

English Literature Series for Schools
General Editor.—J. H. FOWLER, M.A.

CRANFORD



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'TO SEE THE ALDERNEY' (p. 5).

Cranford

By
Mrs. Gaskell

Abridged and Edited for Schools by

Mrs. Frederick Boas

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By HUGH THOMSON

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INTRODUCTION

I ONCE knew a boy, nine years old, whose favourite book was *Cranford*: it had always been a favourite of mine, but when I noticed that urchin in knickerbockers poring over its pages, and heard him chuckling at intervals, I fell to pondering what there was in the slender little book that gave it such a universal human interest.

Cranford is considered a first-class piece of literature by every authority: it is acted continually by children: it is enjoyed and quoted by readers of every age and type, from my small friend who took it in turns with "Jack the Giant Killer," to elderly men and women, who seem to find a comfortable sense of companionship in the length of time Miss Matty devoted to choosing her new silk dress, or the energy with which Captain Brown gave himself up to playing cards at the Cranford evening parties.

An affectionate companionship with the book, dating from childish days, inclines me to account for its universal popularity as follows: the daily life, with its ever human interest in matters of food and clothes, of health and gossip, and its restful underlying tone of gentle courtesy, is that for the most part of elderly people; but the whole thing, events, characters, pleasures and misfortunes, is seen always through the eyes of someone who is *not* elderly, *i.e.* Miss Mary Smith: she chronicles the whole; she stays for long visits both with Miss Matty and Miss Pole; she is included in such pieces of dissipation as Miss Betsy Barker's party, when the lobsters and oysters were rendered wholesome at supper by that mysterious drink called Cherry Brandy. Miss Mary Smith, in some occult way, seems to be oneself through all that takes place: she is in the general life, but not quite of it; she might be you or me looking on. Even at Miss Barker's party

she does not join in the game of cards where the four ladies' caps go "niddle-noddling" over the table, and she certainly does not share the slumbers of the fat and Honourable Mrs. Jamieson; no, she sits by herself at a little table, on which the hostess has kindly put out for her entertainment several old fashion-books, because "she knew young people liked to look at pictures."

So, as you make your first acquaintance with *Cranford*, try to imagine Miss Mary Smith yourself; then you will glow with pride when the strip of newspaper you have cut really does keep off the sun from the new drawing-room carpet, or when you arrive breathless at Mrs. Forrester's door after running in the gloom beside the sedan-chair all through the perils of Darkness Lane; and you will be stirred to even deeper feelings of emotion by that lion-shaped pudding—bought with her own money—which Martha set before you and Miss Matty the day after the Town and County Bank stopped payment; or at that solemn assembly in Miss Pole's drawing-room, when each lady wrote down in secret the sum she could contribute to her dear old friend in her fallen fortunes; and when even cowslip wine and ladies'-finger biscuits failed to revive anyone sufficiently to make an answering speech to that of the ever-ready Miss Pole.

An interesting subject to study in the book is that of dress, its variations from that of our own day, and its dainty and minute importance. Caps, collars, lace and brooches, had all a prominence not theirs to-day; and a shawl was then not merely a wrap, but an adornment in which one attended church. A visit to Cranford also introduces us to a few less familiar articles of attire, and perhaps when we see them we have a secret wonder as to whether we did well to let them go so completely out of fashion. Have we ever found a really satisfactory substitute for a "calash"? It was a neat headdress made of gathered silk, or some other soft material, stiffened with whalebone and drawn over the head by a string, thus doing away with that common fear among women—of spoiling their hats on a wet day. Perhaps there was not so much to be said in favour of "pattens," though they possessed one advantage over their successor the golosh—they did not put their wearer through the painful process described as "drawing the feet": on the other hand, there was a danger of

twisting or spraining the ankle if one tried to hurry on the raised patten, and there was the tiresome clicking noise with every step upon the pavement.

Another interesting difference between Miss Matty's day and our own is in the meal-times. The Hon. Mrs. Jamieson, the leader of fashion in the place, dined at five o'clock, the other ladies rather earlier. Calling hours were from twelve to three, so presumably dinner was somewhere about four. On one occasion, however, lunch "with a savoury mutton chop" was mentioned, so it seems probable that there was the same variation then as now between early and late dinner in different households; only the early dinner was even earlier than ours, and the late dinner never strayed beyond an hour we should consider suitable for afternoon tea.

The fact that Mrs. Gaskell was a Unitarian, and so was but little concerned with the church and parish life of Knutsford—the Cheshire village near Manchester with which Cranford is usually identified—is evidently the reason why the church and clergy do not play the part one might expect in this tale of everyday existence. It is pleasant to know that the dry and dusty rector, together with his choirboys, enjoyed to the full the marvels of Signor Brunoni's conjuring performance; but one hardly gets a clearer impression of him than of his predecessor, the father of Miss Matty and the austere Miss Debōrah, who visited his flock in knee-breeches and a shovel-hat.

The underlying tragedy of the story is connected with that shadowy figure of the late rector. "He only did what he thought was right"; such were his wife's words about him in her pathetic little letter to their boy; but his methods of education were severe even for those days. He was far less akin to his son than to his elder daughter, whom he had called after the Hebrew Prophetess, and who seemed to the keen eyes of the on-looker, Mary Smith, to have taken that severe authority for a model in character—"making allowance, of course, for modern customs and difference in dress." He never understood the boy from first to last; if he had, he would not have exacted from him "show" letters full of classical quotations when he was a schoolboy, and still less would he have performed the undignified act of walloping

him in the rectory garden, in the sight of his petrified parishioners, because the boy had played a silly practical joke on his domineering elder sister.

The joke makes one laugh, and its consequences make one cry, and so the story goes ; pathos and humour so closely interwoven that one cannot see, any more than in life itself, where the one ends and the other begins.

So felt Mary Smith on each of her visits to Cranford, and so will each one of us feel when we enter the pleasant little place as Mrs. Gaskell lets us see it, and pass in and out among its kindly inhabitants. Ladies they are for the most part, and not very young, but there are men among them too ; though they are rather apt to be ignored by posterity, much as they were by Miss Pole herself, who had no illusions on the subject of men, and understood the sex well from the overwhelming reason—" my father was a man."

The ladies of Cranford have become famous : some we love and some we fear, but we like to have at least a bowing acquaintance with them all. May I put in a plea for the men among them, that they too be kindly remembered when we visit the pleasant little town ?—Captain Brown and Mr. Hoggins, Signor Brunoni, and Jem Hearn ; and, above all, that picturesque pair who were friends in youth, and who shared a lifelong devotion to gentle Miss Matty, Mr. Thomas Holbrook, yeoman, and poor Peter, the Aga Jenkyns.

THE AUTHOR.

ELIZABETH CLEGHORN STEVENSON, afterwards Mrs. Gaskell, was born on September 29th, 1810, in Belle Vue Lodge, Lindsey Row, a small house in Chelsea, now known as 93 Cheyne Walk. Her father was a Unitarian minister ; her mother, one of the Holland family, died soon after her birth, and the child was brought up by her mother's married sister Mrs. Lumb, who lived at Knutsford in Cheshire. In 1832 she married William Gaskell, the Unitarian minister of the Cross St. Chapel in Manchester. They had four daughters, and one son whose early death was a lifelong sorrow to his mother, a sorrow reflected in several of her books. (Note the words in Mrs. Jenkyns's letter to Peter in *Cranford*, " My

dear only boy.") *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*, published in 1849, is a foretaste of *Cranford* in some ways, and the place Duncombe is another picture of Knutsford. Her first book was *Mary Barton*, 1848, and among her chief works may be mentioned, the life of her friend and contemporary Charlotte Brontë, 1857, *North and South*, 1854, *Sylvia's Lovers*, 1863, and *Wives and Daughters*, which was unfinished at her death in 1864.

CRANFORD

CHAPTER I

OUR SOCIETY

IN the first place, Cranford is in possession of the Amazons ; all the holders of houses, above a certain rent, are women. If a married couple come to settle in the town, somehow the gentleman disappears ; he is either fairly frightened to death by being the only man in the Cranford evening parties, or he is accounted for by being with his regiment, his ship, or closely engaged in business all the week in the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble, distant only twenty miles on a railroad. In short, whatever does become of the gentlemen, they are not at Cranford. What could they do if they were there ? 10 The surgeon has his round of thirty miles, and sleeps at Cranford ; but every man cannot be a surgeon. For keeping the trim gardens full of choice flowers without a weed to speck them ; for frightening away little boys who look wistfully at the said flowers through the railings ; for rushing out at the geese that occasionally venture into the gardens if the gates are left open ; for deciding all questions of literature and politics without troubling themselves with unnecessary reasons or arguments ; for obtaining clear and correct knowledge of everybody's affairs in the parish ; for keeping their 20 neat maid-servants in admirable order ; for kindness (somewhat dictatorial) to the poor, and real tender good offices to each other whenever they are in distress, the ladies of Cranford are quite sufficient. " A man," as one of them observed to me once, " is so in the way in the house ! " Although the

ladies of Cranford know all each other's proceedings, they are exceedingly indifferent to each other's opinions. Indeed, as each has her own individuality, not to say eccentricity, pretty strongly developed, nothing is so easy as verbal retaliation ; but, somehow, goodwill reigns among them to a considerable degree.

The Cranford ladies have only an occasional little quarrel, spirted out in a few peppery words and angry jerks of the head ; just enough to prevent the even tenor of their lives
10 from becoming too flat. Their dress is very independent of fashion ; as they observe. " What does it signify how we dress here at Cranford, where everybody knows us ? " And if they go from home, their reason is equally cogent, " What does it signify how we dress here, where nobody knows us ? "

Then there were rules and regulations for visiting and calls ; and they were announced to any young people, who might be staying in the town, with all the solemnity with which the old Manx laws were read once a year on the Tinwald
20 Mount.

" Our friends have sent to inquire how you are after your journey to-night, my dear " (fifteen miles, in a gentleman's carriage) ; " they will give you some rest to-morrow, but the next day, I have no doubt, they will call ; so be at liberty after twelve—from twelve to three are our calling hours."

Then, after they had called,—

" It is the third day ; I dare say your mamma has told you, my dear, never to let more than three days elapse between receiving a call and returning it ; and also, that you are never
30 to stay longer than a quarter of an hour."

" But am I to look at my watch ? How am I to find out when a quarter of an hour has passed ? "

" You must keep thinking about the time, my dear, and not allow yourself to forget it in conversation."

As everybody had this rule in their minds, whether they received or paid a call, of course no absorbing subject was ever

spoken about. We kept ourselves to short sentences of small talk, and were punctual to our time.

I imagine that a few of the gentlefolks of Cranford were poor, and had some difficulty in making both ends meet ; but none of us spoke of money, because that subject savoured of commerce and trade, and though some might be poor, we were all aristocratic. The Cranfordians had that kindly *esprit de corps* which made them overlook all deficiencies in success when some among them tried to conceal their poverty. When Mrs. Forrester, for instance, gave a party in her baby-house 10 of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, every one took this novel proceeding as the most natural thing in the world, and talked on about household forms and ceremonies as if we all believed that our hostess had a regular servants' hall, second table, with housekeeper and steward, instead of the one little charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray upstairs, if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who now sat in state, pretending not 20 to know what cakes were sent up, though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge-cakes.

There were one or two consequences arising from this general but unacknowledged poverty, and this very much acknowledged gentility, which were not amiss, and which might be introduced into many circles of society to their great improvement. For instance, the inhabitants of Cranford kept early hours, and clattered home in their pattens, 30 under the guidance of a lantern-bearer, about nine o'clock at night ; and the whole town was abed and asleep by half-past ten. Moreover, it was considered "vulgar" (a tremendous word in Cranford) to give anything expensive, in the way of eatable or drinkable, at the evening entertainments. Wafer bread-and-butter and sponge-biscuits were all that the

Honourable Mrs. Jamieson gave ; and she was sister-in-law to the late Earl of Glenmire, although she did practise such "elegant economy."

"Elegant economy !" How naturally one falls back into the phraseology of Cranford ! There, economy was always "elegant," and money-spending always "vulgar and ostentatious" ; a sort of sour grapeism which made us very peaceful and satisfied. I never shall forget the dismay felt when a certain Captain Brown came to live at Cranford, and openly
10 spoke about his being poor—not in a whisper to an intimate friend, the doors and windows being previously closed, but in the public street ! in a loud military voice ! alleging his poverty as a reason for not taking a particular house. The ladies of Cranford were already rather moaning over the invasion of their territories by a man and a gentleman. Yet, somehow, Captain Brown made himself respected in Cranford, and was called upon, in spite of all resolutions to the contrary. I was surprised to hear his opinions quoted as authority at a visit which I paid to Cranford about a year after he had
20 settled in the town ; and I am sure he was startled one day when he found his advice so highly esteemed as to make some counsel which he had given in jest to be taken in sober, serious earnest.

It was on this subject : An old lady had an Alderney cow, which she looked upon as a daughter. You could not pay the short quarter of an hour call without being told of the wonderful milk or wonderful intelligence of this animal. The whole town knew and kindly regarded Miss Betsy Barker's Alderney ; therefore great was the sympathy and regret when, in an un-
30 guarded moment, the poor cow tumbled into a lime-pit. She moaned so loudly that she was soon heard and rescued ; but meanwhile the poor beast had lost most of her hair, and came out looking naked, cold, and miserable, in a bare skin. Everybody pitied the animal, though a few could not restrain their smiles at her droll appearance. Miss Betsy Barker absolutely cried with sorrow and dismay ; and it was said she thought

of trying a bath of oil. This remedy, perhaps, was recommended by some one of the number whose advice she asked ; but the proposal, if ever it was made, was knocked on the head by Captain Brown's decided " Get her a flannel waistcoat and flannel drawers, ma'am, if you wish to keep her alive. But my advice is, kill the poor creature at once."

Miss Betsy Barker dried her tears, and thanked the captain heartily ; she set to work, and by-and-by all the town turned out to see the Alderney meekly going to her pasture, clad in dark gray flannel. I have watched her myself many a time. 10

Captain Brown had taken a small house on the outskirts of the town, where he lived with his two daughters. He must have been upwards of sixty at the time of the first visit I paid to Cranford after I had left it as a residence. But he had a wiry, well-trained, elastic figure, a stiff military throw-back of his head, and a springing step, which made him appear much younger than he was. His eldest daughter looked almost as old as himself ; she had a sickly, pained, careworn expression, and looked as if the gaiety of youth had long faded out of sight. Miss Jessie Brown was ten years younger than her 20 sister, and twenty shades prettier. Her face was round and dimpled. Miss Jenkyns once said, in a passion against Captain Brown (the cause of which I will tell you presently), " that she thought it was time for Miss Jessie to leave off her dimples, and not always to be trying to look like a child."

I wondered what the Cranford ladies did with Captain Brown at their parties. We had often rejoiced, in former days, that there was no gentleman to be attended to, and to find conversation for, at the card-parties ; so that when I found my friend and hostess, Miss Jenkyns, was going to have a 30 party in my honour, and that Captain and the Miss Browns were invited, I wondered much what would be the course of the evening. Card-tables, with green baize tops, were set out by daylight, just as usual ; it was the third week in November, so the evenings closed in about four. Candles and clean packs of cards were arranged on each table. The fire was made up ;

the neat maid-servant had received her last directions ; and there we stood, dressed in our best, each with a candle-lighter in our hands, ready to dart at the candles as soon as the first knock came. Parties in Cranford were solemn festivities, making the ladies feel gravely elated as they sat together in their best dresses. As soon as three had arrived, we sat down to "Preference," I being the unlucky fourth. The next four comers were put down immediately to another table ; and presently the tea-trays, which I had seen set out in the store-
10 room as I passed in the morning, were placed each on the middle of a card-table. The china was delicate egg-shell ; the old-fashioned silver glittered with polishing ; but the eatables were of the slightest description. While the trays were yet on the tables, Captain and the Miss Browns came in ; and I could see that, somehow or other, the captain was a favourite with all the ladies present. Ruffled brows were smoothed, sharp voices lowered at his approach. Miss Brown looked ill, and depressed almost to gloom. Miss Jessie smiled as usual, and seemed nearly as popular as her father. He
20 immediately and quietly assumed the man's place in the room ; attended to every one's wants, lessened the pretty maid-servant's labour by waiting on empty cups and bread-and-butterless ladies ; and yet did it all in so easy and dignified a manner, and so much as if it were a matter of course for the strong to attend to the weak, that he was a true man throughout. He played for threepenny points with as grave an interest as if they had been pounds ; and yet in all his attention to strangers, he had an eye on his suffering daughter—for suffering I was sure she was, though to many
30 eyes she might only appear to be irritable. Miss Jessie could not play cards : but she talked to the sitters-out, who, before her coming, had been rather inclined to be cross. She sang, too, to an old cracked piano, which I think had been a spinet in its youth. Miss Jessie sang "Jock of Hazeldean" a little out of tune ; but we were none of us musical, though Miss Jenkyns beat time, out of time, by way of appearing to be so.

When the trays reappeared with biscuits and wine, punctually at a quarter to nine, there was conversation, comparing of cards, and talking over tricks ; but by-and-by Captain Brown sported a bit of literature.

"Have you seen any numbers of 'The Pickwick Papers'?" said he. (They were then publishing in parts.) "Capital thing!"

Now Miss Jenkyns was daughter of a deceased rector of Cranford ; and, on the strength of a number of manuscript sermons, and a pretty good library of divinity, considered 10 herself literary, and looked upon any conversation about books as a challenge to her. So she answered, and said, "Yes, she had seen them ; indeed, she might say she had read them."

"And what do you think of them?" exclaimed Captain Brown. "Aren't they famously good?"

So urged, Miss Jenkyns could not but speak.

"I must say, I don't think they are by any means equal to Dr. Johnson. Still, perhaps the author is young. Let him persevere, and who knows what he may become if he will take the great doctor for his model." This was evidently too much 20 for Captain Brown to take placidly ; and I saw the words on the tip of his tongue before Miss Jenkyns had finished her sentence.

"It is quite a different sort of thing, my dear madam," he began.

"I am quite aware of that," returned she. "And I make allowances, Captain Brown."

"Just allow me to read you a scene out of this month's number," pleaded he. "I had it only this morning, and I don't think the company can have read it yet." 30

"As you please," said she, settling herself with an air of resignation. He read the account of the "swarry" which Sam Weller gave at Bath. Some of us laughed heartily. I did not dare, because I was staying in the house. Miss Jenkyns sat in patient gravity. When it was ended, she turned to me, and said, with mild dignity,—

"Fetch me 'Rasselas,' my dear, out of the book-room."

When I brought it to her, she turned to Captain Brown,—

"Now allow *me* to read you a scene, and then the present company can judge between your favourite, Mr. Boz, and Dr. Johnson."

She read one of the conversations between Rasselas and Imlac, in a high-pitched, majestic voice; and when she had ended, she said, "I imagine I am now justified in my preference of Dr. Johnson as a writer of fiction." The captain
10 screwed his lips up, and drummed on the table, but he did not speak. She thought she would give a finishing blow or two.

"I consider it vulgar, and below the dignity of literature, to publish in numbers."

"How was the 'Rambler' published, ma'am?" asked Captain Brown, in a low voice, which I think Miss Jenkyns could not have heard.

"Dr. Johnson's style is a model for young beginners. My father recommended it to me when I began to write letters—
20 I have formed my own style upon it; I recommend it to your favourite."

"I should be very sorry for him to exchange his style for any such pompous writing," said Captain Brown.

Miss Jenkyns felt this as a personal affront, in a way of which the captain had not dreamed. Epistolary writing she and her friends considered as her *forte*. Many a copy of many a letter have I seen written and corrected on the slate, before she "seized the half-hour just previous to post-time to assure"
30 her friends of this or of that: and Dr. Johnson was, as she said, her model in these compositions. She drew herself up with dignity, and only replied to Captain Brown's last remark by saying, with marked emphasis on every syllable, "I prefer Dr. Johnson to Mr. Boz."

It is said—I won't vouch for the fact—that Captain Brown was heard to say, *sotto voce*, "D—n Dr. Johnson!" If he did, he was penitent afterwards, as he showed by going to

stand near Miss Jenkyns's armchair, and endeavouring to beguile her into conversation on some more pleasing subject. But she was inexorable. The next day she made the remark I have mentioned about Miss Jessie's dimples.

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTAIN

It was impossible to live a month at Cranford and not know the daily habits of each resident ; and long before my visit was ended I knew much concerning the whole Brown trio. There was nothing new to be discovered respecting their poverty ; for they had spoken simply and openly about that from the very first. They made no mystery of the necessity 10 for their being economical. All that remained to be discovered was the captain's infinite kindness of heart, and the various modes in which, unconsciously to himself, he manifested it. Some little anecdotes were talked about for some time after they occurred. As we did not read much, and as all the ladies were pretty well suited with servants, there was a dearth of subjects for conversation. We therefore discussed the circumstance of the captain taking a poor old woman's dinner out of her hands one very slippery Sunday. He had met her returning from the bakehouse as he came from church, and 20 noticed her precarious footing ; and, with the grave dignity with which he did everything, he relieved her of her burden, and steered along the street by her side, carrying her baked mutton and potatoes safely home. This was thought very eccentric ; and it was rather expected that he would pay a round of calls on the Monday morning to explain and apologize to the Cranford sense of propriety ; but he did no such thing ; and then it was decided that he was ashamed, and was keeping out of sight. In a kindly pity for him, we began to say, " After all, the Sunday morning's occurrence 30

showed great goodness of heart," and it was resolved that he should be comforted on his next appearance amongst us ; but, lo ! he came down upon us, untouched by any sense of shame, speaking loud and bass as ever, his head thrown back, his wig as jaunty and well-curved as usual, and we were obliged to conclude he had forgotten all about Sunday.

When I went to visit Miss Pole, I saw more of the Browns than I had done while staying with Miss Jenkyns, who had never got over what she called Captain Brown's disparaging
10 remarks upon Dr. Johnson as a writer of light and agreeable fiction. I found that Miss Brown was seriously ill of some lingering, incurable complaint, the pain occasioned by which gave the uneasy expression to her face that I had taken for unmitigated crossness. Cross, too, she was at times, when the nervous irritability occasioned by her disease became past endurance. All this was borne by Miss Jessie and her father with more than placidity—with absolute tenderness. I forgave Miss Jessie her singing out of tune, and her juvenility of dress, when I saw her at home. I came to perceive that
20 Captain Brown was a man of infinite resources, gained in his barrack experience. As he confessed, no one could black his boots to please him, except himself ; but, indeed, he was not above saving the little maid-servant's labours in every way—knowing, most likely, that his daughter's illness made the place a hard one.

He endeavoured to make peace with Miss Jenkyns, soon after the memorable dispute I have named, by a present of a wooden fire-shovel (his own making), having heard her say how much the grating of an iron one annoyed her. She
30 received the present with cool gratitude, and thanked him formally. When he was gone, she bade me put it away in the lumber-room ; feeling, probably, that no present from a man who preferred Mr. Boz to Dr. Johnson could be less jarring than an iron fire-shovel.

Such was the state of things when I left Cranford and went to Drumble. I had, however, several correspondents who

kept me *au fait* as to the proceedings of the dear little town. There was Miss Pole, Miss Matilda Jenkyns (who did not mind being called Miss Matty, when Miss Jenkyns was not by), and Miss Jenkyns—Debōrah, as she liked Miss Matty to call her, her father having once said that the Hebrew name ought to be so pronounced. I secretly think she took the Hebrew prophetess for a model in character; and, indeed, she was not unlike the stern prophetess in some ways, making allowance, of course, for modern customs and difference in dress. Miss Jenkyns wore a cravat, and a little bonnet like 10 a jockey-cap, and altogether had the appearance of a strong-minded woman; although she would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men. Equal, indeed! she knew they were superior.

My next visit to Cranford was in the summer. There had been neither births, deaths, nor marriages since I was there last. Everybody lived in the same house, and wore pretty nearly the same well-preserved, old-fashioned clothes. The greatest event was, that the Miss Jenkynses had purchased a new carpet for the drawing-room. Oh, the busy work Miss 20 Matty and I had in chasing the sunbeams, as they fell in an afternoon right down on this carpet through the blindless window! We spread newspapers over the places and sat down to our book or our work; and, lo! in a quarter of an hour the sun had moved, and was blazing away on a fresh spot; and down again we went on our knees to alter the position of the newspapers. We were very busy, too, one whole morning, before Miss Jenkyns gave her party, in following her directions, and in cutting out and stitching together pieces of newspaper so as to form little paths to every chair 30 set for the expected visitors, lest their shoes might dirty or defile the purity of the carpet.

Captain Brown and Miss Jenkyns were not very cordial to each other. He was rather ostentatious in his preference of the writings of Mr. Boz; would walk through the streets so absorbed in them that he all but ran against Miss Jenkyns.

The poor, brave captain ! he looked older, and more worn, and his clothes were very threadbare. But he seemed as bright and cheerful as ever, unless he was asked about his daughter's health.

"She suffers a great deal, and she must suffer more ; we do what we can to alleviate her pain ; God's will be done !" He took off his hat at these last words. I found, from Miss Matty, that everything had been done, in fact. A medical man, of high repute in that country neighbourhood, had been
10 sent for, and every injunction he had given was attended to, regardless of expense. Miss Matty was sure they denied themselves many things in order to make the invalid comfortable ; but they never spoke about it ; and as for Miss Jessie ! "I really think she's an angel," said poor Miss Matty, quite overcome.

Captain Brown called one day to thank Miss Jenkyns for many little kindnesses, which I did not know until then that she had rendered. He had suddenly become like an old man ; his deep bass voice had a quavering in it, his eyes looked dim,
20 and the lines on his face were deep. He did not—could not—speak cheerfully of his daughter's state, but he talked with manly, pious resignation, and not much. Twice over he said, "What Jessie has been to us, God only knows !" and after the second time, he got up hastily, shook hands all round without speaking, and left the room.

That afternoon we perceived little groups in the street, all listening with faces aghast to some tale or other. Miss Jenkyns wondered what could be the matter for some time before she took the undignified step of sending Jenny out to
30 inquire.

Jenny came back with a white face of terror. "Oh, ma'am ! oh, Miss Jenkyns, ma'am ! Captain Brown is killed by them nasty cruel railroads !" and she burst into tears. She, along with many others, had experienced the poor captain's kindness.

"How ?—where—where ? Good God ! Jenny, don't waste time in crying, but tell us something." Miss Matty

rushed out into the street at once, and collared the man who was telling the tale.

"Come in—come to my sister at once—Miss Jenkyns, the rector's daughter. Oh, man, man!—say it is not true," she cried, as she brought the affrighted carter, sleeking down his hair, into the drawing-room, where he stood with his wet boots on the new carpet, and no one regarded it.

"Please, mum, it is true. I see'd it myself," and he shuddered at the recollection. "The captain was a-reading some new book as he was deep in, a-waiting for the down 10 train; and there was a little lass as wanted to come to its mammy, and gave its sister the slip, and came toddling across the line. And he looked up sudden, at the sound of the train coming, and see'd the child, and he darted on the line and cotched it up, and his foot slipped, and the train came over him in no time. O Lord, Lord! Mum, it's quite true—and they've come over to tell his daughters. The child's safe, though, with only a bang on its shoulder, as he threw it to its mammy. Poor captain would be glad of that, mum, wouldn't he? God bless him!" The great rough carter puckered 20 up his manly face, and turned away to hide his tears. I turned to Miss Jenkyns. She looked very ill, as if she were going to faint, and signed to me to open the window.

"Matilda, bring me my bonnet. I must go to those girls. God pardon me, if ever I have spoken contemptuously to the captain!"

Miss Jenkyns arrayed herself to go out, telling Miss Matilda to give the man a glass of wine. While she was away, Miss Matty and I huddled over the fire, talking in a low and awestruck voice. I know we cried quietly all the time. 30

Miss Jenkyns came home in a silent mood, and we durst not ask her many questions. She told us that Miss Jessie had fainted, and that she and Miss Pole had had some difficulty in bringing her round; but that, as soon as she recovered, she begged one of them to go and sit with her sister.

"Mr. Hoggins says she cannot live many days, and she shall be spared this shock," said Miss Jessie, shivering with feelings to which she dared not give way.

"But how can you manage, my dear?" asked Miss Jenkyns; "you cannot bear up; she must see your tears."

"God will help me—I will not give way—she was asleep when the news came; she may be asleep yet. She would be so utterly miserable, not merely at my father's death, but to think of what would become of me."

10 It was settled according to Miss Jessie's wish. Miss Brown was to be told her father had been summoned to take a short journey on railway business. They had managed it in some way—Miss Jenkyns could not exactly say how. Miss Pole was to stop with Miss Jessie. Mrs. Jamieson had sent to inquire. And this was all we heard that night; and a sorrowful night it was. The next day a full account of the fatal accident was in the county paper, which Miss Jenkyns took in. Her eyes were very weak, she said, and she asked me to read it. When I came to the "gallant gentleman was deeply
20 engaged in the perusal of a number of 'Pickwick,' which he had just received," Miss Jenkyns shook her head long and solemnly, and then sighed out, "Poor, dear, infatuated man!"

That afternoon Miss Jenkyns sent out for a yard of black crape, and employed herself busily in trimming the little black silk bonnet I have spoken about. When it was finished she put it on, and looked at us for approbation—admiration she despised. I was full of sorrow, but, by one of those whimsical thoughts which come unbidden into our heads, in times of deepest grief, I no sooner saw the bonnet than I was
30 reminded of a helmet; and in that hybrid bonnet, half helmet, half jockey cap, did Miss Jenkyns attend Captain Brown's funeral; and, I believe, supported Miss Jessie with a tender, indulgent firmness which was invaluable, allowing her to weep her passionate fill before they left.

Miss Pole, Miss Matty, and I, meanwhile, attended to Miss Brown; and hard work we found it to relieve her querulous

and never-ending complaints. But if we were so weary and dispirited, what must Miss Jessie have been ! Yet she came back almost calm, as if she had gained a new strength. She put off her mourning dress, and came in, looking pale and gentle, thanking us each with a soft long pressure of the hand.

It was settled that Miss Pole was to remain with her all the watching livelong night ; and that Miss Matty and I were to return in the morning to relieve them, and give Miss Jessie the opportunity for a few hours of sleep. But when the morning came, Miss Jenkyns appeared at the breakfast-table, 10 equipped in her helmet bonnet, and ordered Miss Matty to stay at home, as she meant to go and help to nurse. She was evidently in a state of great friendly excitement, which she showed by eating her breakfast standing, and scolding the household all round.

No nursing—no energetic strong-minded woman could help Miss Brown now. There was that in the room as we entered which was stronger than us all, and made us shrink into solemn awestruck helplessness. Miss Brown was dying. We hardly knew her voice, it was so devoid of the complaining 20 tone we had always associated with it. Miss Jessie told me afterwards that it, and her face too, were just what they had been formerly, when her mother's death left her the young anxious head of the family, of whom only Miss Jessie survived.

She was conscious of her sister's presence, though not, I think, of ours. We stood a little behind the curtain : Miss Jessie knelt with her face near her sister's, in order to catch the last soft whispers.

In a few moments more Miss Brown lay calm and still— 30 never to sorrow or murmur more.

After this second funeral, Miss Jenkyns insisted that Miss Jessie should come to stay with her rather than go back to the desolate house, which, in fact, we learned from Miss Jessie, must now be given up, as she had not wherewithal to maintain it. She had something above twenty pounds a

year, besides the interest of the money for which the furniture would sell ; but she could not live upon that ; and so we talked over her qualifications for earning money.

"I can sew neatly," said she, "and I like nursing. I think, too, I could manage a house, if any one would try me as housekeeper ; or I would go into a shop as saleswoman, if they would have patience with me at first."

Miss Jenkyns declared, in an angry voice, that she should do no such thing ; and talked to herself about "some people
10 having no idea of their rank as a captain's daughter," nearly an hour afterwards, when she brought Miss Jessie up a basin of delicately-made arrowroot, and stood over her like a dragoon until the last spoonful was finished ; then she disappeared. Miss Jessie began to tell me some more of the plans which had suggested themselves to her, and insensibly fell into talking of the days that were past and gone, and interested me so much I neither knew nor heeded how time passed. We were both startled when Miss Jenkyns re-appeared, and caught us crying. I was afraid lest she would
20 be displeased, as she often said that crying hindered digestion, and I knew she wanted Miss Jessie to get strong ; but, instead, she looked queer and excited, and fidgeted round us without saying anything. At last she spoke.

"I have been so much startled—no, I've not been at all startled—don't mind me, my dear Miss Jessie—I've been very much surprised—in fact, I've had a caller, whom you knew once, my dear Miss Jessie——"

Miss Jessie went very white, then flushed scarlet, and looked eagerly at Miss Jenkyns.

30 "A gentleman, my dear, who wants to know if you would see him."

"Is it ?—it is not——" stammered out Miss Jessie, and got no further.

"This is his card," said Miss Jenkyns, giving it to Miss Jessie ; and while her head was bent over it, Miss Jenkyns went through a series of winks and odd faces to me, and

formed her lips into a long sentence, of which, of course, I could not understand a word.

"May he come up?" asked Miss Jenkyns at last.

"Oh yes, certainly!" said Miss Jessie, as much as to say, this is your house, you may show any visitor where you like. She took up some knitting of Miss Matty's, and began to be very busy, though I could see how she trembled all over.

Miss Jenkyns rang the bell, and told the servant who answered it to show Major Gordon upstairs; and presently in walked a tall, fine, frank-looking man of forty or upwards. 10 He shook hands with Miss Jessie; but he could not see her eyes, she kept them so fixed on the ground. Miss Jenkyns asked me if I would come and help her to tie up the preserves in the storeroom, and there told me what Major Gordon had told her; how he had served in the same regiment with Captain Brown, and had become acquainted with Miss Jessie, then a sweet-looking, blooming girl of eighteen; how the acquaintance had grown into love on his part; how he had offered and been refused; and how he had discovered that the obstacle was the fell disease which was, even then, too 20 surely threatening her sister. There was no one but herself to nurse her poor Mary, or cheer and comfort her father during the time of illness. They had had long discussions; he had grown angry, and broken off entirely, and gone abroad, believing that she was cold-hearted. He had been travelling in the East, and was on his return home when he saw the account of Captain Brown's death.

Just then Miss Matty, who had been out all the morning, and had only lately returned to the house, burst in with a face of dismay and outraged propriety. 30

"Oh, goodness me!" she said. "Deborah, there's a gentleman sitting in the drawing-room with his arm round Miss Jessie's waist!" Miss Matty's eyes looked large with terror.

Miss Jenkyns snubbed her down in an instant.

"The most proper place in the world for his arm to be in.

Go away, Matilda, and mind your own business." This from her sister, who had hitherto been a model of feminine decorum, was a blow for poor Miss Matty, and with a double shock she left the room.

The last time I ever saw poor Miss Jenkyns was many years after this. Mrs. Gordon had kept up a warm and affectionate intercourse with all at Cranford. Miss Jenkyns, Miss Matty, and Miss Pole had all been to visit her, and returned with wonderful accounts of her house, her husband, her dress, and
10 her looks. At the time to which I have referred, when I last saw Miss Jenkyns, that lady was old and feeble, and had lost something of her strong mind. Little Flora Gordon was staying with the Misses Jenkyns, and when I came in, she was reading aloud to Miss Jenkyns, who lay feeble and changed on the sofa.

"Ah!" said Miss Jenkyns, "you find me changed, my dear. I can't see as I used to do. If Flora were not here to read to me, I hardly know how I should get through the day. Did you ever read the 'Rambler'? It's a wonderful book—
20 wonderful! and the most improving reading for Flora" (which I dare say it would have been, if she could have read half the words without spelling, and could have understood the meaning of a third), "better than that strange old book, with the queer name, poor Captain Brown was killed for reading." She babbled on long enough for Flora to get a good long spell at the "Christmas Carol," which Miss Matty had left on the table.

CHAPTER III

A LOVE AFFAIR OF LONG AGO

I THOUGHT that probably my connection with Cranford would cease after Miss Jenkyns's death. I was pleasantly surprised,
30 therefore, by receiving a letter from Miss Pole (who had always come in for a supplementary week after my annual

visit to Miss Jenkyns) proposing that I should go and stay with her ; and then, in a couple of days after my acceptance, came a note from Miss Matty, in which, in a rather circuitous and very humble manner, she told me how much pleasure I should confer if I could spend a week or two with her, either before or after I had been at Miss Pole's ; " for," she said, " since my dear sister's death, I am well aware I have no attractions to offer ; it is only to the kindness of my friends that I can owe their company."

Of course, I promised to come to dear Miss Matty as soon 10 as I had ended my visit to Miss Pole ; and the day after my arrival at Cranford I went to see her, much wondering what the house would be like without Miss Jenkyns, and rather dreading the changed aspect of things. Miss Matty began to cry as soon as she saw me. She was evidently nervous from having anticipated my call. I comforted her as well as I could ; and I found the best consolation I could give was the honest praise that came from my heart as I spoke of the deceased. Miss Matty slowly shook her head over each virtue as it was named and attributed to her sister ; and at last she 20 could not restrain the tears which had long been silently flowing, but hid her face behind her handkerchief, and sobbed aloud.

" Dear Miss Matty," said I, taking her hand, for indeed I did not know in what way to tell her how sorry I was for her, left deserted in the world. She put down her handkerchief, and said,—

" My dear, I'd rather you did not call me Matty. *She* did not like it ; but I did many a thing she did not like, I'm afraid—and now she's gone ! If you please, my love, will you call 30 me Matilda ? "

I promised faithfully, and began to practise the new name with Miss Pole that very day ; and, by degrees, Miss Matilda's feeling on the subject was known through Cranford, and we all tried to drop the more familiar name, but with so little success that by-and-by we gave up the attempt.

My visit to Miss Pole was very quiet. Miss Jenkyns had so long taken the lead in Cranford that, now she was gone, they hardly knew how to give a party. The Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, to whom Miss Jenkyns herself had always yielded the post of honour, was fat and inert, and very much at the mercy of her old servants. If they chose that she should give a party, they reminded her of the necessity for so doing; if not, she let it alone. There was all the more time for me to hear old-world stories from Miss Pole, while she sat
10 knitting and I making my father's shirts. I always took a quantity of plain sewing to Cranford; for, as we did not read much or walk much, I found it a capital time to get through my work. One of Miss Pole's stories related to a shadow of a love affair that was dimly perceived or suspected long years before.

Presently, the time arrived when I was to remove to Miss Matilda's house. I found her timid and anxious about the arrangements for my comfort. Many a time, while I was unpacking, did she come backwards and forwards to stir the
20 fire, which burned all the worse for being so frequently poked.

"Have you drawers enough, dear?" asked she. "I don't know exactly how my sister used to arrange them. She had capital methods. I am sure she would have trained a servant in a week to make a better fire than this, and Fanny has been with me four months."

This subject of servants was a standing grievance, and I could not wonder much at it; for if gentlemen were scarce, and almost unheard of in the "genteel society" of Cranford, they or their counterparts—handsome young men—abounded
30 in the lower classes. Fanny was forbidden, by the articles of her engagement, to have "followers"; and though she had answered, innocently enough, doubling up the hem of her apron as she spoke, "Please, ma'am, I never had more than one at a time," Miss Matty prohibited that one.

However, it so fell out that Fanny had to leave; and Miss Matilda begged me to stay and "settle her" with the new

maid ; to which I consented, after I had heard from my father that he did not want me at home. The new servant was a rough, honest-looking country girl, who had only lived in a farm place before ; but I liked her looks when she came to be hired ; and I promised Miss Matilda to put her in the ways of the house. The said ways were religiously such as Miss Matilda thought her sister would approve. Many a domestic rule and regulation had been a subject of plaintive whispered murmur to me during Miss Jenkyns's life ; but now that she was gone, I do not think that even I, who was a 10 favourite, durst have suggested an alteration. To give an instance : we constantly adhered to the forms which were observed, at meal times, in " my father, the rector's house." Accordingly, we had always wine and dessert ; but the decanters were only filled when there was a party, and what remained was seldom touched, though we had two wine-glasses apiece every day after dinner, until the next festive occasion arrived, when the state of the remainder wine was examined into in a family council. The dregs were often given to the poor ; but occasionally, when a good deal had been left 20 at the last party (five months ago, it might be), it was added to some of a fresh bottle, brought up from the cellar. I fancy poor Captain Brown did not much like wine, for I noticed he never finished his first glass, and most military men take several. Then, as to our dessert, Miss Jenkyns used to gather currants and gooseberries for it herself, which I sometimes thought would have tasted better fresh from the trees ; but then, as Miss Jenkyns observed, there would have been nothing for dessert in summer-time. As it was, we felt very genteel with our two glasses apiece, and a dish of gooseberries 30 at the top, of currants and biscuits at the sides, and two decanters at the bottom. When oranges came in, a curious proceeding was gone through. Miss Jenkyns did not like to cut the fruit ; for, as she observed, the juice all ran out nobody knew where ; sucking (only I think she used some more recondite word) was in fact the only way of enjoying oranges ;

but then there was the unpleasant association with a ceremony frequently gone through by little babies ; and so, after dessert, in orange season, Miss Jenkyns and Miss Matty used to rise up, possess themselves each of an orange in silence, and withdraw to the privacy of their own rooms to indulge in sucking oranges.

I had once or twice tried, on such occasions, to prevail on Miss Matty to stay, and had succeeded in her sister's lifetime. I held up a screen, and did not look, and, as she said, she tried
10 not to make the noise very offensive ; but now that she was left alone, she seemed quite horrified when I begged her to remain with me in the warm dining-parlour, and enjoy her orange as she liked best. And so it was in everything. Miss Jenkyns's rules were made more stringent than ever, because the framer of them was gone where there could be no appeal. In all things else Miss Matilda was meek and undecided to a fault.

Martha was blunt and plain-spoken ; otherwise she was a brisk, well-meaning, but very ignorant girl. She had
20 not been with us a week before Miss Matilda and I were astounded one morning by the receipt of a letter from a cousin of hers, who had been twenty or thirty years in India, and who had lately, as we had seen by the *Army List*, returned to England, bringing with him an invalid wife, who had never been introduced to her English relations. Major Jenkyns wrote to propose that he and his wife should spend a night at Cranford on his way to Scotland—at the inn, if it did not suit Miss Matilda to receive them into her house ; in which case they should hope to be with her as much as possible during
30 the day. Of course it *must* suit her, as she said ; for all Cranford knew that she had her sister's bedroom at liberty ; but I am sure she wished the major had stopped in India and forgotten his cousins out and out.

“ Oh, how must I manage ? ” asked she helplessly. “ If Deborah had been alive she would have known what to do with a gentleman visitor. Must I put razors in his dressing-

room ? Dear, dear, and I've got none. Deborah would have had them. And slippers, and coat-brushes ?" I suggested that probably he would bring all these things with him. "And after dinner, how am I to know when to get up and leave him to his wine ? Deborah would have done it so well ; she would have been quite in her element. Will he want coffee, do you think ?" I undertook the management of the coffee, and told her I would instruct Martha in the art of waiting—in which it must be owned she was terribly deficient—and that I had no doubt Major and Mrs. Jenkyns would 10 understand the quiet mode in which a lady lived by herself in a country town. But she was sadly fluttered. I made her empty her decanters, and bring up two fresh bottles of wine. I wished I could have prevented her from being present at my instructions to Martha, for she frequently cut in with some fresh direction, muddling the poor girl's mind, as she stood open-mouthed, listening to us both.

"Hand the vegetables round," said I ; and then, seeing her look bewildered, I added, "take the vegetables round to people, and let them help themselves." 20

"And mind you go first to the ladies," put in Miss Matilda. "Always go to the ladies before gentlemen when you are waiting."

"I'll do it as you tell me, ma'am," said Martha ; "but I like lads best."

We felt very uncomfortable and shocked at this speech of Martha's, yet I don't think she meant any harm ; and, on the whole, she attended very well to our directions, except that she "nudged" the major when he did not help himself as soon as she expected to the potatoes, while she was handing 30 them round.

The major and his wife were quiet, unpretending people enough when they did come ; languid, as all East Indians are, I suppose. We were rather dismayed at their bringing two servants with them, a Hindoo body-servant for the major, and a steady elderly maid for his wife ; but they slept

at the inn, and took off a good deal of the responsibility by attending carefully to their master's and mistress's comfort. On the whole, the visit was most satisfactory, and is a subject of conversation even now with Miss Matilda.

And *now* I come to the love affair.

It seems that Miss Pole had a cousin, once or twice removed, who had offered to Miss Matty long ago. Now this cousin lived four or five miles from Cranford on his own estate ; but his property was not large enough to entitle him to rank higher 10 than a yeoman ; or rather, with something of the "pride which apes humility," he had refused to push himself on, as so many of his class had done, into the ranks of the squires. He would not allow himself to be called Thomas Holbrook, *Esq.* ; he even sent back letters with this address, telling the postmistress at Cranford that his name was *Mr.* Thomas Holbrook, yeoman. He rejected all domestic innovations ; he would have the house door stand open in summer and shut in winter, without knocker or bell to summon a servant. The closed fist or the knob of the stick did this office for him 20 if he found the door locked. He spoke the dialect of the country in perfection, and constantly used it in conversation ; although Miss Pole (who gave me these particulars) added, that he read aloud more beautifully and with more feeling than any one she had ever heard, except the late rector.

"And how came Miss Matilda not to marry him ?" asked I.

"Oh, I don't know. She was willing enough, I think ; but you know Cousin Thomas would not have been enough of a gentleman for the rector and Miss Jenkyns."

"Well, but they were not to marry him," said I impatiently.

30 "No ; but they did not like Miss Matty to marry below her rank. You know she was the rector's daughter, and somehow they are related to Sir Peter Arley : Miss Jenkyns thought a deal of that."

"Poor Miss Matty !" said I.

"Nay, now, I don't know anything more than that he offered and was refused. Miss Matty might not like him—

and Miss Jenkyns might never have said a word—it is only a guess of mine.”

“Has she never seen him since?” I inquired.

“No, I think not. You see, Woodley, Cousin Thomas’s house, lies half-way between Cranford and Misselton; and I know he made Misselton his market town very soon after he had offered to Miss Matty; and I don’t think he has been into Cranford above once or twice since—once, when I was walking with Miss Matty, in High Street, and suddenly she darted from me, and went up Shire Lane. A few minutes after I was 10 startled by meeting Cousin Thomas.”

“How old is he?” I asked, after a pause of castle-building.

“He must be about seventy, I think, my dear,” said Miss Pole, blowing up my castle, as if by gunpowder, into small fragments.

Very soon after, I had the opportunity of seeing Mr. Holbrook; seeing, too, his first encounter with his former love after thirty or forty years’ separation. I was helping to decide whether any of the new assortment of coloured silks which they had just received at the shop would do to match 20 a gray and black mousseline-de-laine that wanted a new breadth, when a tall, thin, old man came into the shop for some woollen gloves. I had never seen the person (who was rather striking) before, and I watched him rather attentively while Miss Matty listened to the shopman. The stranger wore a blue coat with brass buttons, drab breeches, and gaiters, and drummed with his fingers on the counter until he was attended to. When he answered the shop-boy’s question, “What can I have the pleasure of showing you to-day, sir?” I saw Miss Matilda start, and then suddenly sit down; and 30 instantly I guessed who it was. She had made some inquiry which had to be carried round to the other shopman.

“Miss Jenkyns wants the black sarsenet two-and-twopence the yard”; and Mr. Holbrook had caught the name, and was across the shop in two strides.

“Matty—Miss Matilda—Miss Jenkyns! God bless my

soul ! I should not have known you. How are you—how are you ? ” He kept shaking her hand in a way which proved the warmth of his friendship ; but he repeated so often, as if to himself, “ I should not have known you ! ” that any sentimental romance which I might be inclined to build was quite done away with by his manner.

However, he kept talking to us all the time we were in the shop ; and then waving the shopman with the unpurchased gloves, on one side, with “ Another time, sir, another time ! ”
10 he walked home with us. Miss Matilda left the shop in an equally bewildered state, not having purchased either green or red silk. Mr. Holbrook was evidently full with honest, loud-spoken joy at meeting his old love again ; he touched on the changes that had taken place ; he even spoke of Miss Jenkyns as “ Your poor sister ! Well, well, we have all our faults ! ” and bade us good-bye with many a hope that he should soon see Miss Matty again. She went straight to her room, and never came back till our early tea-time, when I thought she looked as if she had been crying.

CHAPTER IV

A VISIT TO AN OLD BACHELOR

20 A FEW days after, a note came from Mr. Holbrook, asking us, in a formal, old-fashioned style, to spend a day at his house—a long June day—for it was June now. He named that he had also invited his cousin, Miss Pole ; so that we might join in a fly, which could be put up at his house.

I expected Miss Matty to jump at this invitation ; but, no ! Miss Pole and I had the greatest difficulty in persuading her to go. She thought it was improper ; and was even half-annoyed when we ignored the idea of any impropriety in her going with two other ladies to see her old lover. Then came
30 a more serious difficulty. She did not think Deborah would

have liked her to go. This took us half a day's good hard talking to get over ; but, at the first sentence of relenting, I seized the opportunity, and wrote and dispatched an acceptance in her name—fixing day and hour, that all might be decided and done with.

The next morning she asked me if I would go down to the shop with her ; and there, after much hesitation, we chose out three caps to be sent home and tried on, that the most becoming might be selected to take with us on Thursday.

She was in a state of silent agitation all the way to Woodley. 10 It was a long drive there, through paved, jolting lanes. Miss Matilda sat bolt upright, and looked wistfully out of the windows as we drew near the end of our journey. We got out at a little gate, and walked up a straight box-edged path.

"My cousin might make a drive, I think," said Miss Pole, who was afraid of earache, and had only her cap on.

"I think it is very pretty," said Miss Matty, with a soft plaintiveness in her voice, and almost in a whisper, for just then Mr. Holbrook appeared at the door, rubbing his hands in very effervescence of hospitality. His respectable house-keeper stood modestly at the door to bid us welcome ; and, while she led the elder ladies upstairs to a bedroom, I begged to look about the garden. My request evidently pleased the old gentleman, who took me all round the place, and showed me his six-and-twenty cows, named after the different letters of the alphabet. As we went along, he surprised me occasionally by repeating apt and beautiful quotations from the poets, ranging easily from Shakespeare and George Herbert to those of our own day.

When he and I went in, we found that dinner was nearly 30 ready in the kitchen—for so I suppose the room ought to be called, as there were oak dressers and cupboards all round, all over by the side of the fireplace, and only a small Turkey carpet in the middle of the flag-floor. The room in which we were expected to sit was a stiffly-furnished, ugly apartment ; but that in which we did sit was what Mr. Holbrook called

the counting-house, when he paid his labourers their weekly wages at a great desk near the door. The rest of the pretty sitting-room—looking into the orchard, and all covered over with dancing tree-shadows—was filled with books. They lay on the ground, they covered the walls, they strewed the table. He was evidently half ashamed and half proud of his extravagance in this respect.

“ Ah ! ” he said, “ we farmers ought not to have much time for reading ; yet somehow one can’t help it.”

10 “ What a pretty room ! ” said Miss Matty.

“ What a pleasant place ! ” said I, almost simultaneously.

“ Nay ! if you like it,” replied he ; “ but can you sit on these great black leather three-cornered chairs ? I like it better than the best parlour ; but I thought ladies would take that for the smarter place.”

It was the smarter place, but, like most smart things, not at all pretty, or pleasant, or homelike ; so, while we were at dinner, the servant girl dusted and scrubbed the counting-house chairs, and we sat there all the rest of the day.

20 We had pudding before meat ; and I thought Mr. Holbrook was going to make some apology for his old-fashioned ways, for he began,—

“ I don’t know whether you like new-fangled ways.”

“ Oh, not at all ! ” said Miss Matty.

“ No more do I,” said he. “ My housekeeper *will* have these in her new fashion ; or else I tell her that, when I was a young man, we used to keep strictly to my father’s rule, ‘ No broth, no ball ; no ball, no beef ’ ; and always began dinner with broth. Then we had suet puddings, boiled in
30 the broth with the beef ; and then the meat itself. If we did not sup our broth, we had no ball, which we liked a deal better ; and the beef came last of all, and only those had it who had done justice to the broth and the ball. Now folks begin with sweet things, and turn their dinners topsy-turvy.”

When the ducks and green peas came, we looked at each other in dismay ; we had only two-pronged, black-handled

forks. It is true the steel was as bright as silver ; but what were we to do ? Miss Matty picked up her peas, one by one, on the point of the prongs. Miss Pole sighed over her delicate



REQUESTED HER TO FILL THE BOWL.

young peas as she left them on one side of her plate untasted, for they *would* drop between the prongs. I looked at my host ; the peas were going wholesale into his capacious mouth, shovelled up by his large, round-ended knife. I saw, I

imitated, I survived ! My friends, in spite of my precedent, could not muster up courage enough to do an ungenteeled thing ; and, if Mr. Holbrook had not been so heartily hungry, he would probably have seen that the good peas went away almost untouched.

After dinner, a clay pipe was brought in, and a spittoon ; and, asking us to retire to another room, where he would soon join us, if we disliked tobacco smoke, he presented his pipe to Miss Matty, and requested her to fill the bowl. This was a
10 compliment to a lady in his youth ; but it was rather inappropriate to propose it as an honour to Miss Matty, who had been trained by her sister to hold smoking of every kind in utter abhorrence. But if it was a shock to her refinement, it was also a gratification to her feelings to be thus selected ; so she daintily stuffed the strong tobacco into the pipe, and then we withdrew.

"It is very pleasant dining with a bachelor," said Miss Matty softly, as we settled ourselves in the counting-house. "I only hope it is not improper ; so many pleasant things
20 are !"

"What a number of books he has !" said Miss Pole, looking round the room. "And how dusty they are !"

"I think it must be like one of the great Dr. Johnson's rooms," said Miss Matty. "What a superior man your cousin must be !"

"Yes !" said Miss Pole, "he's a great reader ; but I am afraid he has got into very uncouth habits with living alone."

"Oh, uncouth is too hard a word. I should call him eccentric ; very clever people always are !" replied Miss
30 Matty.

When Mr. Holbrook returned, he proposed a walk in the fields ; but the two elder ladies were afraid of damp and dirt, and had only very unbecoming calashes to put on over their caps ; so they declined, and I was again his companion in a turn which he said he was obliged to take to see after his men. He strode along, either wholly forgetting my existence, or

soothed into silence by his pipe—and yet it was not silence exactly. He walked before me, with a stooping gait, his hands clasped behind him; and, as some tree or cloud, or glimpse of distant upland pastures, struck him, he quoted poetry to himself, saying it out loud in a grand, sonorous voice, with just the emphasis that true feeling and appreciation give. We came upon an old cedar tree, which stood at one end of the house—

“The cedar spreads his dark-green layers of shade.”

“Capital term—‘layers!’ Wonderful man!” I did not 10 know whether he was speaking to me or not; but I put in an assenting “wonderful,” although I knew nothing about it, just because I was tired of being forgotten, and of being consequently silent.

He turned sharp round. “Aye! you may say ‘wonderful.’ Why, when I saw the review of his poems in *Blackwood*, I set off within an hour, and walked seven miles to Misselton (for the horses were not in the way) and ordered them. Now, what colour are ash-buds in March?”

Is the man going mad? thought I. He is very like Don 20 Quixote.

“What colour are they, I say?” repeated he vehemently.

“I am sure I don’t know, sir,” said I, with the meekness of ignorance.

“I knew you didn’t. No more did I—an old fool that I am!—till this young man comes and tells me. Black as ash-buds in March. And I’ve lived all my life in the country; more shame for me not to know. Black: they are jet-black, madam.” And he went off again, swinging along to the music of some rhyme he had got hold of. 30

When we came back, nothing would serve him but he must read us the poems he had been speaking of; and Miss Pole encouraged him in his proposal, I thought, because she wished me to hear his beautiful reading, of which she had boasted; but she afterwards said it was because she had got to a difficult

part of her crochet, and wanted to count her stitches without having to talk. Whatever he had proposed would have been right to Miss Matty; although she did fall sound asleep within five minutes after he had begun a long poem, called "Locksley Hall," and had a comfortable nap, unobserved, till he ended; when the cessation of his voice wakened her up, and she said, feeling that something was expected, and that Miss Pole was counting,—

"What a pretty book!"

10 "Pretty, madam! it's beautiful! Pretty, indeed!"

"Oh yes! I meant beautiful!" said she, fluttered at his disapproval of her word. "It is so like that beautiful poem of Dr. Johnson's my sister used to read—I forget the name of it; what was it, my dear?" turning to me.

"Which do you mean, ma'am? What was it about?"

"I don't remember what it was about, and I've quite forgotten what the name of it was; but it was written by Dr. Johnson, and was very beautiful, and very like what Mr. Holbrook has just been reading."

20 "I don't remember it," said he reflectively. "But I don't know Dr. Johnson's poems well. I must read them."

As we were getting into the fly to return, I heard Mr. Holbrook say he should call on the ladies soon, and inquire how they got home; and this evidently pleased and fluttered Miss Matty at the time he said it; but after we had lost sight of the old house among the trees her sentiments towards the master of it were gradually absorbed into a distressing wonder as to whether Martha had broken her word, and seized on the opportunity of her mistress's absence to have a "follower."

30 Martha looked good, and steady, and composed enough, as she came to help us out; she was always careful of Miss Matty, and to-night she made use of this unlucky speech,—

"Eh, dear ma'am, to think of your going out in an evening in such a thin shawl! It's no better than muslin. At your age, ma'am, you should be careful."

"My age!" said Miss Matty, almost speaking crossly, for

her, for she was usually gentle—"My age! Why, how old do you think I am, that you talk about my age?"

"Well, ma'am, I should say you were not far short of sixty; but folks' looks is often against them—and I'm sure I meant no harm."

"Martha, I'm not yet fifty-two!" said Miss Matty, with grave emphasis; for probably the remembrance of her youth had come very vividly before her this day, and she was annoyed at finding that golden time so far away in the past.

But she never spoke of any former and more intimate 10 acquaintance with Mr. Holbrook. She had probably met with so little sympathy in her early love that she had shut it up close in her heart; and it was only by a sort of watching, which I could hardly avoid since Miss Pole's confidence, that I saw how faithful her poor heart had been in its sorrow and its silence.

She gave me some good reason for wearing her best cap every day, and sat near the window, in spite of her rheumatism, in order to see, without being seen, down into the street.

He came. He put his open palms upon his knees, which 20 were far apart, as he sat with his head bent down, whistling, after we had replied to his inquiries about our safe return. Suddenly he jumped up.

"Well, madam, have you any commands for Paris? I am going there in a week or two."

"To Paris!" we both exclaimed.

"Yes, madam. I've never been there, and always had a wish to go; and I think if I don't go soon, I mayn't go at all; so as soon as the hay is got in I shall go, before harvest time."

We were so much astonished that we had no commissions. 30

Just as he was going out of the room, he turned back, with his favourite exclamation,—

"God bless my soul, madam, but I nearly forgot half my errand. Here are the poems for you you admired so much the other evening at my house." He tugged away at a parcel in his coat-pocket. "Good-bye, miss," said he; "good-bye,

Matty ; take care of yourself." And he was gone. But he had given her a book, and he had called her Matty, just as he used to do thirty years ago.

"I wish he would not go to Paris," said Miss Matilda anxiously. "I don't believe frogs will agree with him ; he used to have to be very careful what he ate, which was curious in so strong-looking a young man."

Soon after this I took my leave, giving many an injunction to Martha to look after her mistress, and to let me know if
10 she thought that Miss Matilda was not so well ; in which case I would volunteer a visit to my old friend, without noticing Martha's intelligence to her.

Accordingly I received a line or two from Martha every now and then ; and, about November, I had a note to say her mistress was "very low and sadly off her food" ; and the account made me so uneasy that, although Martha did not decidedly summon me, I packed up my things and went.

I received a warm welcome, in spite of the little flurry produced by my impromptu visit, for I had only been able
20 to give a day's notice. Miss Matilda looked miserably ill ; and I prepared to comfort and cosset her.

I went down to have a private talk with Martha.

"How long has your mistress been so poorly ?" I asked, as I stood by the kitchen fire.

"Well, I think it's better than a fortnight ; it is, I know. It was one Tuesday, after Miss Pole had been, that she went into this moping way. I thought she was tired, and it would go off with a night's rest ; but no ! she has gone on and on ever since, till I thought it my duty to write to you, ma'am."

30 "You did quite right, Martha. It is a comfort to think she has so faithful a servant about her. And I hope you find your place comfortable ?"

"Well, ma'am, missus is very kind, and there's plenty to eat and drink, and no more work but what I can do easily—but——" Martha hesitated.

"But what, Martha ?"

"Why, it seems so hard of missus not to let me have any followers; there's such lots of young fellows in the town; and many a one has as much as offered to keep company with me. Many a girl as I know would have 'em unbeknownst to missus; but I've given my word, and I'll stick to it; or else this is just the house for missus never to be the wiser if they did come: and it's such a capable kitchen—there's such good dark corners in it—I'd be bound to hide any one. I counted up last Sunday night—for I'll not deny I was crying because I had to shut the door in Jem Hearn's face, and he's a steady 10 young man, fit for any girl; only I had given missus my word." Martha was all but crying again; and I had little comfort to give her, for I knew, from old experience, of the horror with which both the Miss Jenkynses looked upon "followers"; and in Miss Matty's present nervous state this dread was not likely to be lessened.

I went to see Miss Pole the next day, and took her completely by surprise, for she had not been to see Miss Matilda for two days.

"And now I must go back with you, my dear, for I promised 20 to let her know how Thomas Holbrook went on; and, I'm sorry to say, his housekeeper has sent me word to-day that he hasn't long to live. Poor Thomas! that journey to Paris was quite too much for him. His housekeeper says he has hardly ever been round his fields since, but just sits with his hands on his knees in the counting-house, not reading or anything, but only saying what a wonderful city Paris was! Paris has much to answer for if it's killed my Cousin Thomas, for a better man never lived."

"Does Miss Matilda know of his illness?" asked I, a new 30 light as to the cause of her indisposition dawning upon me.

"Dear, to be sure, yes! Has not she told you? I let her know a fortnight ago, or more, when first I heard of it. How odd she shouldn't have told you!"

Not at all, I thought; but I did not say anything. I felt almost guilty of having spied too curiously into that tender

heart, and I was not going to speak of its secrets—hidden, Miss Matty believed, from all the world. I ushered Miss Pole into Miss Matilda's little drawing-room, and then left them alone. But I was not surprised when Martha came to my bedroom door, to ask me to go down to dinner alone, for that missus had one of her bad headaches.

The next day Miss Pole brought us word that Mr. Holbrook was dead. Miss Matty heard the news in silence; in fact, from the account of the previous day, it was only what we
10 had to expect. Miss Pole kept calling upon us for some expression of regret, by asking if it was not sad that he was gone, and saying,—

“To think of that pleasant day last June, when he seemed so well! And he might have lived this dozen years if he had not gone to that wicked Paris, where they are always having revolutions.”

She paused for some demonstration on our part. I saw Miss Matty could not speak, she was trembling so nervously; so I said what I really felt: and after a call of some duration
20 —all the time of which I have no doubt Miss Pole thought Miss Matty received the news very calmly—our visitor took her leave.

Miss Matty made a strong effort to conceal her feelings—she has never alluded to Mr. Holbrook again, although the book he gave her lies with her Bible on the little table by her bedside. She did not think I heard her when she asked the little milliner of Cranford to make her caps something like the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson's, or that I noticed the reply,—

“But she wears widows' caps, ma'am!”

30 “Oh! I only meant something in that style; not widow's, of course, but rather like Mrs. Jamieson's.”

This effort at concealment was the beginning of the tremulous motion of head and hands which I have seen ever since in Miss Matty.

The evening of the day on which we heard of Mr. Holbrook's death, Miss Matilda was very silent and thoughtful; after

prayers she called Martha back, and then she stood, uncertain what to say.

"Martha!" she said at last, "you are young," and then she made so long a pause that Martha, to remind her of her half-finished sentence, dropped a curtsy, and said,—

"Yes, please, ma'am; two-and-twenty last third of October, please, ma'am."

"And, perhaps, Martha, you may sometime meet with a young man you like, and who likes you. I did say you were not to have followers; but if you meet with such a young 10 man, and tell me, and I find he is respectable, I have no objection to his coming to see you once a week. God forbid!" said she, in a low voice, "that I should grieve any young hearts." She spoke as if she were providing for some distant contingency, and was rather startled when Martha made her ready eager answer.

"Please, ma'am, there's Jem Hearn, and he's a joiner making three-and-sixpence a day, and six foot one in his stocking-feet, please, ma'am; and if you'll ask about him to-morrow morning, every one will give him a character for 20 steadiness; and he'll be glad enough to come to-morrow night, I'll be bound."

Though Miss Matty was startled, she submitted to Fate and Love.

CHAPTER V

OLD LETTERS

I HAVE often noticed that almost every one has his own individual small economies; now, Miss Matty Jenkyns was chary of candles. We had many devices to use as few as possible. In the winter afternoons she would sit knitting for two or three hours—she could do this in the dark, or by fire-light—and when I asked if I might not ring for candles to 30 finish stitching my wristbands, she told me to "keep blind

man's holiday." They were usually brought in with tea ; but we only burnt one at a time.

One night, I remember this candle economy particularly annoyed me, especially as Miss Matty had fallen asleep, and I did not like to stir the fire and run the risk of awakening her ; so I could not even sit on the rug, and scorch myself with sewing by firelight, according to my usual custom. I fancied Miss Matty must be dreaming of her early life ; for she spoke one or two words in her uneasy sleep bearing
10 reference to persons who were dead long before. When Martha brought in the lighted candle and tea, Miss Matty started into wakefulness, with a strange, bewildered look around, as if we were not the people she expected to see about her. All through tea-time her talk ran upon the days of her childhood and youth. Perhaps this reminded her of the desirableness of looking over all the old family letters, and destroying such as ought not to be allowed to fall into the hands of strangers ; for she had often spoken of the necessity of this task, but had always shrunk from it, with a timid
20 dread of something painful. To-night, however, she rose up after tea and went for them—in the dark ; for she piqued herself on the precise neatness of all her chamber arrangements, and used to look uneasily at me when I lighted a bed-candle to go to another room for anything. When she returned there was a faint, pleasant smell of Tonquin beans in the room. I had always noticed this scent about any of the things which had belonged to her mother ; and many of the letters were addressed to her—yellow bundles of love-letters, sixty or seventy years old.

30 Miss Matty undid the packet with a sigh ; but she stifled it directly, as if it were hardly right to regret the flight of time, or of life either. We agreed to look them over separately, each taking a different letter out of the same bundle, and describing its contents to the other before destroying it.

The earliest set of letters were two bundles tied together,

and ticketed (in Miss Jenkyns's handwriting), "Letters interchanged between my ever-honoured father and my dearly-beloved mother, prior to their marriage in July 1774."

"We must burn them, I think," said Miss Matty, looking doubtfully at me. "No one will care for them when I am gone." And one by one she dropped them into the middle of the fire, watching each blaze up, die out, and rise away, in faint, white, ghostly semblance, up the chimney; before she gave another to the same fate.

The next letter, likewise docketed by Miss Jenkyns, was 10 endorsed, "Letter of pious congratulation and exhortation from my venerable grandfather to my beloved mother, on occasion of my own birth. Also some practical remarks on the desirability of keeping warm the extremities of infants, from my excellent grandmother."

The kind old grandmother was dead when a little boy was born; but there was another letter of exhortation from the grandfather, more stringent and admonitory than ever, now that there was a boy to be guarded from the snares of the world. 20

It seemed curious that I should never have heard of this brother before; but I concluded that he had died young, or else surely his name would have been alluded to by his sisters.

By-and-by we came to packets of Miss Jenkyns's letters. These Miss Matty did regret to burn. She said all the others had been only interesting to those who loved the writers, but Deborah's letters were so very superior! Any one might profit by reading them.

Miss Matty did grudge burning these letters, it was evident. She would not let them be carelessly passed over with any 30 quiet reading, and skipping, to myself. She took them from me, and even lighted the second candle in order to read them aloud with a proper emphasis, and without stumbling over the big words. Oh dear, how I wanted facts instead of reflections, before those letters were concluded! They lasted us two nights; and I won't deny that I made use of the time

to think of many other things, and yet I was always at my post at the end of each sentence.

The rector's letters, and those of his wife and mother-in-law, had all been tolerably short and pithy, written in a straight hand, with the lines very close together. Sometimes the whole letter was contained on a mere scrap of paper. Now, Miss Jenkyns's letters were of a later date in form and writing: She wrote on the square sheet which we have learned to call old-fashioned. Her hand was admirably
10 calculated, together with her use of many-syllabled words, to fill up a sheet, and then came the pride and delight of crossing. Poor Miss Matty got sadly puzzled with this, for the words gathered size like snowballs, and towards the end of her letter Miss Jenkyns used to become quite sesquipedalian. In one to her father, slightly theological and controversial in its tone, she had spoken of Herod, Tetrarch of Idumea. Miss Matty read it "Herod, Petrarch of Etruria," and was just as well pleased as if she had been right.

I can't quite remember the date, but I think it was in 1805
20 that Miss Jenkyns wrote the longest series of letters—on the occasion of her absence on a visit to some friends near Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Peter Marmaduke Arley Jenkyns ("poor Peter!" as Miss Matty began to call him) was at school at Shrewsbury by this time. The rector took up his pen, and rubbed up his Latin once more, to correspond with his boy. It was very clear that the lad's were what are called show letters. They were of a highly mental description, giving an account of his studies, and his intellectual hopes of various kinds, with an occasional
30 quotation from the classics; but, now and then, the animal nature broke out in such a little sentence as this, evidently written in a trembling hurry, after the letter had been inspected: "Mother dear, do send me a cake, and put plenty of citron in." The "mother dear" probably answered her boy in the form of cakes and "goody," for there were none of her letters among this set; but a whole collection of the rector's, to

whom the Latin in his boy's letters was like a trumpet to the old war-horse. I do not know much about Latin, certainly, and it is, perhaps, an ornamental language, but not very useful, I think—at least to judge from the bits I remember out of the rector's letters. Presently it became very evident that "poor Peter" got himself into many scrapes. There were letters of stilted penitence to his father for some wrongdoing; and among them all was a badly-written, badly-sealed, badly-directed, blotted note—"My dear, dear, dear, dearest mother, I will be a better boy; I will, indeed; but I don't, please, be ill for me; I am not worth it; but I will be good, darling mother."

Miss Matty could not speak for crying, after she had read this note. She gave it to me in silence, and then got up and took it to her sacred recesses in her own room, for fear, by any chance, it might get burnt. "Poor Peter!" she said; "he was always in scrapes. He could never resist a joke. Poor Peter!"

CHAPTER VI

POOR PETER

Poor Peter's career lay before him rather pleasantly mapped out by kind friends. He was to win honours at Shrewsbury School, and to carry them thick to Cambridge, and after that, a living awaited him, the gift of his godfather, Sir Peter Arley. Poor Peter! his lot in life was very different to what his friends had hoped and planned. Miss Matty told me all about it, and I think it was a relief to her when she had done so.

The sole honour Peter brought away from Shrewsbury was the reputation of being the best good fellow that ever was, and captain of the school in the art of practical joking. His father was disappointed, but set about remedying the matter in a manly way. He could not afford to send Peter to read

with any tutor, but he could read with him himself ; and Miss Matty told me much of the awful preparations in the way of dictionaries and lexicons that were made in her father's study the morning Peter began.

"My poor mother !" said she. "I remember how she used to stand in the hall, just near enough the study door to catch the tone of my father's voice. I could tell in a moment if all was going right by her face. And it did go right for a long time."

10 "What went wrong at last ?" said I. "That tiresome Latin, I dare say."

"No, it was not the Latin. Peter was in high favour with my father, for he worked up well for him. But he seemed to think that the Cranford people might be joked about and made fun of, and they did not like it ; nobody does. There were many old ladies living here then ; we are principally ladies now, I know, but we are not so old as the ladies used to be when I was a girl. I could laugh to think of some of Peter's jokes. No, my dear, I won't tell you of them, because
20 they might not shock you as they ought to do, and they were very shocking.

"At last there was a terrible, sad thing happened." Miss Matty got up, went to the door, and opened it ; no one was there. She rang the bell for Martha, and when Martha came, her mistress told her to go for eggs to a farm at the other end of the town.

"I will lock the door after you, Martha. You are not afraid to go, are you ?"

"No, ma'am, not at all ; Jem Hearn will be only too proud
30 to go with me."

Miss Matty drew herself up, and as soon as we were alone she wished that Martha had more maidenly reserve.

"We'll put out the candle, my dear. We can talk just as well by firelight, you know. There ! Well, you see, Deborah had gone from home for a fortnight or so ; it was a very still quiet day, I remember, overhead ; and the lilacs were all in

flower, so I suppose it was spring. My father had gone out to see some sick people in the parish ; I recollect seeing him leave the house with his wig and shovel-hat and cane. What possessed our poor Peter I don't know ; he had the sweetest temper, and yet he always seemed to like to plague Deborah. She never laughed at his jokes, and thought him ungenteel, and not careful enough about improving his mind ; and that vexed him.

" Well, he went to her room, it seems, and dressed himself in her old gown, and shawl, and bonnet ; just the things she 10 used to wear in Cranford, and was known by everywhere ; and he made the pillow into a little—you are sure you locked the door, my dear, for I should not like any one to hear—into—into—a little baby, with white long clothes. It was only, as he told me afterwards, to make something to talk about in the town ; he never thought of it as affecting Deborah. And he went and walked up and down in the Filbert Walk—just half hidden by the rails, and half seen ; and he cuddled his pillow, just like a baby, and talked to it all the nonsense people do. Oh dear, and my father came stepping stately up 20 the street, as he always did ; and what should he see but a little black crowd of people—I dare say as many as twenty—all peeping through his garden rails. So he thought, at first, they were only looking at a new rhododendron that was in full bloom, and that he was very proud of ; and he walked slower, that they might have more time to admire. And he wondered if he could make out a sermon from the occasion, and thought, perhaps, there was some relation between the rhododendrons and the lilies of the field. My poor father ! When he came nearer, he began to wonder that they did not see him ; but 30 their heads were all so close together, peeping and peeping ! My father was amongst them, meaning, he said, to ask them to walk into the garden with him, and admire the beautiful vegetable production, when—oh, my dear ! I tremble to think of it—he looked through the rails himself, and saw—I don't know what he thought he saw, but old Clare told me his face

went quite gray-white with anger, and his eyes blazed out under his frowning black brows ; and he spoke out—oh, so terribly !—and bade them all stop where they were—not one of them to go, not one to stir a step ; and, swift as light, he was in at the garden door, and down the Filbert Walk, and seized hold of poor Peter, and tore his clothes off his back—bonnet, shawl, gown, and all—and threw the pillow among the people over the railings : and then he was very, very angry indeed, and before all the people he lifted up his cane
10 and flogged Peter !

“ My dear, that boy’s trick, on that sunny day, when all seemed going straight and well, broke my mother’s heart, and changed my father for life. It did, indeed. Old Clare said, Peter looked as white as my father ; and stood as still as a statue to be flogged ; and my father struck hard ! When my father stopped to take breath, Peter said, ‘ Have you done enough, sir ? ’ quite hoarsely, and still standing quite quiet. I don’t know what my father said, or if he said anything. But old Clare said, Peter turned to where the people outside the
20 railing were, and made them a low bow, as grand and as grave as any gentleman ; and then walked slowly into the house. I was in the storeroom helping my mother to make cowslip wine. I cannot abide the wine now, nor the scent of the flowers ; they turn me sick and faint, as they did that day, when Peter came in, looking as haughty as any man—indeed, looking like a man, not like a boy. ‘ Mother ! ’ he said, ‘ I am come to say, God bless you for ever.’ I saw his lips quiver as he spoke ; and I think he durst not say anything more loving, for the purpose that was in his heart. She looked at
30 him rather frightened, and wondering, and asked him what was to do. He did not smile or speak, but put his arms round her and kissed her as if he did not know how to leave off ; and before she could speak again he was gone. We talked it over, and could not understand it, and she bade me go and seek my father, and ask what it was all about. I found him walking up and down, looking very highly displeased.

“ ‘ Tell your mother I have flogged Peter, and that he richly deserved it.’

“ I durst not ask any more questions. When I told my mother, she sat down, quite faint, for a minute. I remember, a few days after, I saw the poor, withered cowslip flowers thrown out to the leaf heap, to decay and die there. There was no making of cowslip-wine that year at the rectory—nor, indeed, ever after.

“ Presently my mother went to my father. Some time after they came out together ; and then my mother told me 10 what had happened, and that she was going up to Peter’s room at my father’s desire to talk the matter over with him. But no Peter was there. We looked over the house ; no Peter was there ! Even my father, who had not liked to join in the search at first, helped us before long. At first, my mother went calling low and soft, as if to reassure the poor boy, ‘ Peter ! Peter, dear ! it’s only me ’ ; but by-and-by, as the servants came back from the errands my father had sent them, in different directions—as we found he was not in the garden, nor the hayloft, nor anywhere about—my mother’s 20 cry grew louder and wilder, ‘ Peter ! Peter, my darling ! where are you ? ’ for then she felt and understood that that long kiss meant some sad kind of ‘ good-bye.’ My father sat with his head in his hands, not speaking except when his messengers came in, bringing no tidings ; then he lifted up his face, so strong and sad, and told them to go again in some new direction. My mother kept passing from room to room, in and out of the house, moving noiselessly, but never ceasing. At last my father rose up. He took hold of my mother’s arm as she came with wild, sad pace through one door, and quickly 30 towards another.

“ ‘ Molly ! ’ said he, ‘ I did not think all this would happen.’ He looked into her face for comfort—her poor face, all wild and white ; for neither she nor my father had dared to acknowledge the terror that was in their hearts, lest Peter should have made away with himself. My father saw no conscious look

in his wife's hot, dreary eyes, and he missed the sympathy that she had always been ready to give him—and at the dumb despair in her face his tears began to flow. But when she saw this a gentle sorrow came over her countenance, and she said, 'Dearest John ! don't cry ; come with me, and we'll find him,' almost as cheerfully as if she knew where he was. And she took my father's great hand in her little soft one and led him along, the tears dropping as he walked on that same unceasing, weary walk, from room to room, through house and
10 garden."

"Where was Mr. Peter ?" said I.

"He had made his way to Liverpool ; and there was war then ; and some of the king's ships lay off the mouth of the Mersey ; and they were only too glad to have a fine likely boy such as him (five foot nine he was) come to offer himself. The captain wrote to my father, and Peter wrote to my mother. Stay ! those letters will be somewhere here."

We lighted the candle, and found the captain's letter and Peter's too. And we also found a little simple begging letter
20 from Mrs. Jenkyns to Peter, addressed to him at the house of an old schoolfellow, whither she fancied he might have gone. They had returned it unopened ; and unopened it had remained ever since, having been inadvertently put by among the other letters of that time. This is it :—

"MY DEAREST PETER,—You did not think we should be so sorry as we are, I know, or you would never have gone away. You are too good. Your father sits and sighs till my heart aches to hear him. He cannot hold up his head for grief ; and yet he only did what he thought was right. Perhaps he
30 has been too severe, and perhaps I have not been kind enough ; but God knows how we love you, my dear only boy. Don looks so sorry you are gone. Come back, and make us happy, who love you so much. I *know* you will come back."

But Peter did not come back. That spring day was the last time he ever saw his mother's face.

The captain's letter summoned the father and mother to Liverpool instantly, if they wished to see their boy ; and, by some of the wild chances of life, the captain's letter had been detained somewhere, somehow.

Miss Matty went on, " And it was race-time, and all the post-horses at Cranford were gone to the races ; but my father and mother set off in their own gig—and oh ! my dear, they were too late—the ship was gone ! And now read Peter's letter to my mother ! "

It was full of love and sorrow, and pride in his new profes- 10
sion, and a sore sense of his disgrace in the eyes of the people at Cranford ; but ending with a passionate entreaty that she would come and see him before he left the Mersey : " Mother ! we may go into battle. I hope we shall, and lick those French ; but I must see you again before that time."

" And she was too late," said Miss Matty ; " too late ! "

We sat in silence, pondering on the full meaning of those sad, sad words. At length I asked Miss Matty to tell me how her mother bore it.

" Oh ! " she said, " she was patience itself. She had never 20
been strong, and this weakened her terribly. My father used to sit looking at her : far more sad than she was. He seemed as if he could look at nothing else when she was by.

" You see, he saw what we did not—that it was killing her ; for she was but a frail woman, and ill-fitted to stand the fright and shock she had gone through ; but her looks and tones were always cheerful when he was there. And she would speak of how she thought Peter stood a good chance of being admiral very soon—he was so brave and clever ; and how she thought of seeing him in his Navy uniform, and what sort 30
of hats admirals wore ; and how much more fit he was to be a sailor than a clergyman ; and all in that way, just to make my father think she was quite glad of what came of that unlucky morning's work, and the flogging which was always in his mind, as we all knew.

" And only think, love ! the very day after her death—for

she did not live quite a twelvemonth after Peter went away ! —the very day after—came a parcel for her from India—from her poor boy. It was a large, soft, white India shawl, with just a little narrow border all round ; just what my mother would have liked.

“ We thought it might rouse my father, for he had sat with her hand in his all night long ; so Deborah took it in to him, and Peter’s letter to her and all. At first he took no notice ; and we tried to make a kind of light, careless talk about the 10 shawl, opening it out and admiring it. Then suddenly he got up, and spoke. ‘ She shall be buried in it,’ he said ; ‘ Peter shall have that comfort ; and she would have liked it.’

“ We decked her in the long soft folds ; she lay smiling, as if pleased ; and people came—all Cranford came—to beg to see her, for they had loved her dearly as well they might ; and the country-women brought posies ; old Clare’s wife brought some white violets, and begged they might lie on her breast.

“ Deborah said to me, the day of my mother’s funeral, that if she had a hundred offers she never would marry and leave 20 my father. It was not very likely she would have so many—I don’t know that she had one ; but it was not less to her credit to say so. She was such a daughter to my father as I think there never was before or since.”

“ Did Mr. Peter ever come home ? ”

“ Yes, once. He came home a lieutenant ; he did not get to be admiral. And he and my father were such friends ! My father took him into every house in the parish, he was so proud of him. He never walked out without Peter’s arm to lean upon.”

30 “ And then ? ” said I, after a pause.

“ Then Peter went to sea again ; and, by-and-by, my father died, blessing us both, and thanking Deborah for all she had been to him ; and, of course, our circumstances were changed ; and, instead of living at the rectory, and keeping three maids and a man, we had to come to this small house, and be content with a servant-of-all-work.”

"And Mr. Peter?" asked I.

"Oh, there was some great war in India, and we have never heard of Peter since then. I believe he is dead myself; and it sometimes fidgets me that we have never put on mourning for him. And then again, when I sit by myself, and all the house is still, I think I hear his step coming up the street, and my heart begins to flutter and beat; but the sound always goes past—and Peter never comes.

"That's Martha back? No! I'll go, my dear; I can always find my way in the dark, you know. And a blow of 10 fresh air at the door will do my head good, and it's rather got a trick of aching."

So she pattered off. I had lighted the candle, to give the room a cheerful appearance against her return.

"Was it Martha?" asked I.

"Yes. And I am rather uncomfortable, for I heard such a strange noise, just as I was opening the door."

"Where?" I asked, for her eyes were round with affright.

"In the street—just outside—it sounded like——"

"Talking?" I put in, as she hesitated a little.

20.

"No! kissing——"

CHAPTER VII

VISITING

ONE morning, as Miss Matty and I sat at our work—it was before twelve o'clock, and Miss Matty had not changed the cap with yellow ribbons that had been Miss Jenkyns's best, and which Miss Matty was now wearing out in private, putting on the one made in imitation of Mrs. Jamieson's at all times when she expected to be seen—Martha came up, and asked if Miss Betty Barker might speak to her mistress. Miss Matty assented, and quickly disappeared to change the yellow ribbons, while Miss Barker came upstairs; but, as she had 30 forgotten her spectacles, and was rather flurried by the

unusual time of the visit, I was not surprised to see her return with one cap on the top of the other. She was quite unconscious of it herself, and looked at us with bland satisfaction. Nor do I think Miss Barker perceived it; for, putting aside the little circumstance that she was not so young as she had been, she was very much absorbed in her errand, which she delivered herself of with an oppressive modesty that found vent in endless apologies.

Miss Betty Barker was the daughter of the old clerk at 10 Cranford who had officiated in Mr. Jenkyns's time. She and her sister had had pretty good situations as ladies' maids, and had saved money enough to set up a milliners' shop, which had been patronized by the ladies in the neighbourhood.

They were self-denying, good people. Many a time have I seen the eldest of them (she that had been maid to Mrs Jamieson) carrying out some delicate mess to a poor person. They only aped their betters in having "nothing to do" with the class immediately below theirs. And when Miss Barker 20 died, their profits and income were found to be such that Miss Betty was justified in shutting up shop and retiring from business. She also (as I think I have before said) set up her cow; a mark of respectability in Cranford almost as decided as setting up a gig is among some people.

And now Miss Betty Barker had called to invite Miss Matty to tea at her house on the following Tuesday. She prefaced this invitation with so many apologies that she quite excited my curiosity. "Her presumption" was to be excused. What had she been doing? She seemed so overpowered by 30 it, I could only think that she had been writing to Queen Adelaide to ask for a receipt for washing lace; but the act which she so characterized was only an invitation she had carried to her sister's former mistress, Mrs. Jamieson. "Her former occupation considered, could Miss Matty excuse the liberty?" Ah! thought I, she has found out that double cap, and is going to rectify Miss Matty's head-dress. No! it

was simply to extend her invitation to Miss Matty and to me. Miss Matty bowed acceptance ; and I wondered that, in the graceful action, she did not feel the unusual weight and extraordinary height of her head-dress. But I do not think she did, for she recovered her balance, and went on talking to Miss Betty in a kind, condescending manner, very different from the fidgety way she would have had if she had suspected how singular her appearance was.

"Mrs. Jamieson is coming, I think you said ?" asked Miss Matty. 10

"Yes. Mrs. Jamieson most kindly and condescendingly said she would be happy to come. One little stipulation she made, that she should bring Carlo. I told her that if I had a weakness it was for dogs."

"And Miss Pole ?" questioned Miss Matty, who was thinking of her pool at preference, in which Carlo would not be available as a partner.

"I am going to ask Miss Pole. Of course, I could not think of asking her until I had asked you, madam—the rector's daughter, madam. Believe me, I do not forget the situation 20 my father held under yours."

"And Mrs. Forrester, of course ?"

"And Mrs. Forrester. I thought, in fact, of going to her before I went to Miss Pole. Although her circumstances are changed, madam, she was born a Tyrrell, and we can never forget her alliance to the Bigges, of Bigelow Hall."

Miss Matty cared much more for the little circumstance of her being a very good card-player.

"Mrs. Fitz-Adam—I suppose——"

"No, madam. I must draw a line somewhere. Mrs. 30 Jamieson would not, I think, like to meet Mrs. Fitz-Adam. I have the greatest respect for Mrs. Fitz-Adam, but I cannot think her fit society for such ladies as Mrs. Jamieson and Miss Matilda Jenkyns."

Miss Betty Barker bowed low to Miss Matty, and pursed up her mouth. She looked at me with sidelong dignity, as

much as to say, although a retired milliner, she was no democrat, and understood the difference of ranks.

"May I beg you to come as near half-past six, to my little dwelling, as possible, Miss Matilda? Mrs. Jamieson dines at five, but has kindly promised not to delay her visit beyond that time—half-past six." And with a swimming curtsy Miss Betty Barker took her leave.

My prophetic soul foretold a visit that afternoon from Miss Pole, who usually came to call on Miss Matilda after any event
10 —or indeed in sight of any event—to talk it over with her.

"Miss Betty told me it was to be a choice and select few," said Miss Pole, as she and Miss Matty compared notes.

"Yes, so she said. Not even Mrs. Fitz-Adam."

Now Mrs. Fitz-Adam was the widowed sister of the Cranford surgeon, whom I have named before. Their parents were respectable farmers, content with their station. The name of these good people was Hoggins. Mr. Hoggins was the Cranford doctor now; we disliked the name and considered it coarse; but, as Miss Jenkyns said, if he changed it to Piggins
20 it would not be much better.

After Miss Mary Hoggins married Mr. Fitz-Adam she disappeared from the neighbourhood for many years. She did not move in a sphere in Cranford society sufficiently high to make any of us care to know what Mr. Fitz-Adam was. He died, and was gathered to his fathers without our ever having thought about him at all. And then Mrs. Fitz-Adam reappeared in Cranford ("as bold as a lion," Miss Pole said), a well-to-do widow, dressed in rustling black silk, so soon after her husband's death, that poor Miss Jenkyns was justified in
30 the remark she made, that "bombazine would have shown a deeper sense of her loss."

The spring evenings were getting bright and long when three or four ladies in calashes met at Miss Barker's door. Do you know what a calash is? It is a covering worn over caps; but sometimes it is not quite so large. This kind of headgear always

made an awful impression on the children in Cranford ; and now two or three left off their play in the quiet sunny little street, and gathered in wondering silence round Miss Pole, Miss Matty, and myself. We were silent too, so that we could hear loud, suppressed whispers inside Miss Barker's house : " Wait, Peggy, wait till I've run upstairs and washed my hands. When I cough, open the door ; I'll not be a minute."

And, true enough, it was not a minute before we heard a noise, between a sneeze and a crow ; on which the door flew open. Behind it stood a round-eyed maiden, all aghast at the 10 honourable company of calashes, who marched in without a word. She recovered presence of mind enough to usher us into a small room, which had been the shop, but was now converted into a temporary dressing-room. There we unpinned and shook ourselves, and arranged our features before the glass into a sweet and gracious company-face ; and then, bowing backwards with " After you, ma'am," we allowed Mrs. Forrester to take precedence up the narrow staircase that led to Miss Barker's drawing-room. There she sat, as stately and composed as though we had never heard that odd- 20 sounding cough, from which her throat must have been even then sore and rough. Kind, gentle, shabbily-dressed Mrs. Forrester was immediately conducted to the second place of honour. The place of pre-eminence was, of course, reserved for the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson, who presently came panting up the stairs—Carlo rushing round her on her progress as if he meant to trip her up.

And now Miss Betty Barker was a proud and happy woman ! She stirred the fire, and shut the door, and sat as near to it as she could, quite on the edge of her chair. When Peggy came 30 in, tottering under the weight of the tea-tray, I noticed that Miss Barker was sadly afraid lest Peggy should not keep her distance sufficiently. She and her mistress were on very familiar terms in their everyday intercourse, and Peggy wanted now to make several little confidences to her, which Miss Barker was on thorns to hear, but which she thought it

her duty, as a lady, to repress. So she turned away from all Peggy's asides and signs; but she made one or two very malapropos answers to what was said; and at last, seized with a bright idea, she exclaimed, "Poor, sweet Carlo! I'm forgetting him. Come downstairs with me, poor ittie doggie, and it shall have its tea, it shall!"

In a few minutes she returned, bland and benignant as before; but I thought she had forgotten to give the "poor ittie doggie" anything to eat, judging by the avidity with
10 which he swallowed down chance pieces of cake. The tea-tray was abundantly loaded—I was pleased to see it, I was so hungry; but I was afraid the ladies present might think it vulgarly heaped up. I know they would have done at their own houses; but somehow the heaps disappeared here. I saw Mrs. Jamieson eating seed-cake, slowly and considerably, as she did everything; and I was rather surprised, for I knew she had told us, on the occasion of her last party, that she never had it in her house, it reminded her so much of scented soap. She always gave us Savoy biscuits. However, Mrs.
20 Jamieson was kindly indulgent to Miss Barker's want of knowledge of the customs of high life; and, to spare her feelings, ate three large pieces of seed-cake, with a placid, ruminating expression of countenance, not unlike a cow's.

After tea there was some little demur and difficulty. We were six in number; four could play at preference, and for the other two there was cribbage. But all, except myself (I was rather afraid of the Cranford ladies at cards, for it was the most earnest and serious business they ever engaged in), were anxious to be of the "pool." Even Miss Barker, while
30 declaring she did not know spadille from manille, was evidently hankering to take a hand. The dilemma was soon put an end to by a singular kind of noise. If a baron's daughter-in-law could ever be supposed to snore, I should have said Mrs. Jamieson did so then; for, overcome by the heat of the room, and inclined to doze by nature, the temptation of that very comfortable arm-chair had been too much

for her, and Mrs. Jamieson was nodding. Once or twice she opened her eyes with an effort, and calmly but unconsciously smiled upon us ; but, by-and-by, even her benevolence was not equal to this exertion, and she was sound asleep.

"It is very gratifying to me," whispered Miss Barker at the card-table to her three opponents, whom, notwithstanding her ignorance of the game, she was "basting" most unmercifully—"very gratifying indeed, to see how completely Mrs. Jamieson feels at home in my poor little dwelling ; she could not have paid me a greater compliment." 10

Miss Barker provided me with some literature in the shape of three or four handsomely-bound fashion-books ten or twelve years old, observing, as she put a little table and a candle for my especial benefit, that she knew young people liked to look at pictures. Carlo lay and snorted and started at his mistress's feet. He, too, was quite at home.

The card-table was an animated scene to watch ; four ladies' heads, with niddle-nodding caps, all nearly meeting over the middle of the table in their eagerness to whisper quick enough and loud enough ; and every now and then 20 came Miss Barker's "Hush, ladies ! if you please, hush ! Mrs. Jamieson is asleep."

It was very difficult to steer clear between Mrs. Forrester's deafness and Mrs. Jamieson's sleepiness. But Miss Barker managed her arduous task well. She repeated the whisper to Mrs. Forrester, distorting her face considerably, in order to show, by the motions of her lips, what was said ; and then she smiled kindly all round at us, and murmured to herself, "Very gratifying, indeed ; I wish my poor sister had been alive to see this day." 30

Presently the door was thrown wide open ; Carlo started to his feet, with a loud, snapping bark, and Mrs. Jamieson awoke ; or, perhaps, she had not been asleep—as she said almost directly, the room had been so light she had been glad to keep her eyes shut, but had been listening with great interest to all our amusing and agreeable conversation. Peggy

came in once more, red with importance. Another tray !
“ Oh, gentility ! ” thought I, “ can you endure this last
shock ? ” For Miss Barker had ordered (nay, I doubt not,
prepared, although she did say, “ Why, Peggy, what have
you brought us ? ” and looked pleasantly surprised at the
unexpected pleasure) all sorts of good things for supper—
scalloped oysters, potted lobsters, jelly, a dish called “ little
Cupids ” (which was in great favour with the Cranford ladies,
although too expensive to be given, except on solemn and
10 state occasions—macaroons sopped in brandy, I should have
called it, if I had not known its more refined and classical
name). In short, we were evidently to be feasted with all
that was sweetest and best ; and we thought it better to
submit graciously, even at the cost of our gentility—which
never ate suppers in general, but which, like most non-supper
eaters, was particularly hungry on all special occasions.

Miss Barker, in her former sphere, had, I dare say, been
made acquainted with the beverage they call cherry-brandiy.
We none of us had ever seen such a thing, and rather shrank
20 back when she proffered it us—“ just a little, leetle glass,
ladies ; after the oysters and lobsters, you know. Shell-fish
are sometimes thought not very wholesome.” We all shook
our heads like female mandarins ; but, at last, Mrs. Jamieson
suffered herself to be persuaded, and we followed her lead.
It was not exactly unpalatable, though so hot and so strong
that we thought ourselves bound to give evidence that we
were not accustomed to such things by coughing terribly—
almost as strangely as Miss Barker had done, before we were
admitted by Peggy.

30 “ It’s very strong,” said Miss Pole, as she put down her
empty glass ; “ I do believe there’s spirit in it.”

“ Only a little drop—just necessary to make it keep,” said
Miss Barker. “ You know we put brandy-paper over pre-
serves to make them keep. I often feel tipsy myself from
eating damson tart.”

I question whether damson tart would have opened Mrs.

Jamieson's heart as the cherry-brandy did ; but she told us of a coming event, respecting which she had been quite silent till that moment.

" My sister-in-law, Lady Glenmire, is coming to stay with me."

There was a chorus of " Indeed ! " and then a pause. Each one rapidly reviewed her wardrobe, as to its fitness to appear in the presence of a baron's widow ; for, of course, a series of small festivals were always held in Cranford on the arrival of a visitor at any of our friends' houses. We felt very pleasantly 10 excited on the present occasion.

Not long after this the maids and the lanterns were announced. Mrs. Jamieson had the sedan-chair, which had squeezed itself into Miss Barker's narrow lobby with some difficulty, and most literally " stopped the way." It required some skilful manœuvring on the part of the old chairmen (shoemakers by day, but when summoned to carry the sedan dressed up in a strange old livery—long greatcoats, with small capes, coeval with the sedan, and similar to the dress of the class in Hogarth's pictures) to edge, and back, and try at it 20 again, and finally to succeed in carrying their burden out of Miss Barker's front door. Then we heard their quick pit-a-pat along the quiet little street as we put on our calashes and pinned up our gowns ; Miss Barker hovering about us with offers of help, which, if she had not remembered her former occupation, and wished us to forget it, would have been much more pressing.

CHAPTER VIII

" YOUR LADYSHIP "

EARLY the next morning—directly after twelve—Miss Pole made her appearance at Miss Matty's. Some very trifling piece of business was alleged as a reason for the call ; but 30 there was evidently something behind. At last out it came.

"By the way, you'll think I'm strangely ignorant; but, do you really know, I am puzzled how we ought to address Lady Glenmire. Do you say 'Your ladyship,' where you would say 'you' to a common person? I have been puzzling all morning; and are we to say 'My lady,' instead of 'Ma'am'? Now you knew Lady Arley—will you kindly tell me the most correct way of speaking to the peerage?"

Poor Miss Matty! She took off her spectacles and she put them on again, but how Lady Arley was addressed she could
10 not remember.

"It is so long ago," she said. "Dear, dear, how stupid I am! I don't think I ever saw her more than twice. I know we used to call Sir Peter, 'Sir Peter'—but he came much oftener to see us than Lady Arley did. Deborah would have known in a minute. 'My lady'—'your ladyship.' It sounds very strange, and as if it was not natural. I never thought of it before; but, now you have named it, I am all in a puzzle."

It was very certain Miss Pole would obtain no wise decision
20 from Miss Matty, who got more bewildered every moment, and more perplexed as to etiquettes of address.

"Well, I really think," said Miss Pole, "I had better just go and tell Mrs. Forrester about our little difficulty. One sometimes grows nervous; and yet one would not have Lady Glenmire think we were quite ignorant of the etiquettes of high life in Cranford."

"And will you just step in here, dear Miss Pole, as you come back, please, and tell me what you decide upon? Whatever you and Mrs. Forrester fix upon will be quite right, I'm
30 sure."

"Who is Lady Glenmire?" asked I.

"Oh, she's the widow of Mr. Jamieson—that's Mrs. Jamieson's late husband, you know—widow of his eldest brother. Mrs. Jamieson was a Miss Walker, daughter of Governor Walker. 'Your ladyship.' My dear, if they fix on that way of speaking, you must just let me practise a little

on you first, for I shall feel so foolish and hot saying it the first time to Lady Glenmire."

It was really a relief to Miss Matty when Mrs. Jamieson came on a very unpolite errand. I notice that apathetic people have more quiet impertinence than others; and Mrs. Jamieson came now to insinuate pretty plainly that she did not particularly wish that the Cranford ladies should call upon her sister-in-law. I can hardly say how she made this clear; for I grew very indignant and warm, while with slow deliberation she was explaining her wishes to Miss Matty, 10 who, a true lady herself, could hardly understand the feeling which made Mrs. Jamieson wish to appear to her noble sister-in-law as if she only visited "county" families. Miss Matty remained puzzled and perplexed long after I had found out the object of Mrs. Jamieson's visit.

When she did understand the drift of the honourable lady's call, it was pretty to see with what quiet dignity she received the intimation thus uncourteously given. Mrs. Jamieson was, indeed, the more flurried of the two, and I could see she was glad to take her leave. 20

A little while afterwards Miss Pole returned, red and indignant. "Well, to be sure! You've had Mrs. Jamieson here, I find from Martha; and we are not to call on Lady Glenmire. Yes, I met Mrs. Jamieson, half-way between here and Mrs. Forrester's, and she told me; she took me so by surprise, I had nothing to say. I wish I had thought of something very sharp and sarcastic; I dare say I shall to-night. And Lady Glenmire is but the widow of a Scotch baron after all! I went on to look at Mrs. Forrester's Peerage, to see who this lady was, that is to be kept under a glass case; 30 widow of a Scotch peer—never sat in the House of Lords—and as poor as Job, I dare say; and she—fifth daughter of some Mr. Campbell or other.

Miss Matty tried to soothe Miss Pole, but in vain. That lady, usually so kind and good-humoured, was now in a full flow of anger.

“ And I went and ordered a cap this morning, to be quite ready,” said she, at last, letting out the secret which gave sting to Mrs. Jamieson’s intimation. “ Mrs. Jamieson shall see if it is so easy to get me to make fourth at a pool when she has none of her fine Scotch relations with her ! ”

In coming out of church, the first Sunday on which Lady Glenmire appeared in Cranford, we sedulously talked together, and turned our backs on Mrs. Jamieson and her guest. If we might not call on her, we would not even look at her, though
10 we were dying with curiosity to know what she was like.

Another Sunday passed away, and we still averted our eyes from Mrs. Jamieson and her guest, and made remarks to ourselves that we thought were very severe—almost too much so. Miss Matty was evidently uneasy at our sarcastic manner of speaking.

Perhaps by this time Lady Glenmire had found out that Mrs. Jamieson’s was not the gayest, liveliest house in the world ; perhaps Mrs. Jamieson had found out that most of the county families were in London, and that those who
20 remained in the country were not so alive as they might have been to the circumstance of Lady Glenmire being in their neighbourhood. Great events spring out of small causes ; so I will not pretend to say what induced Mrs. Jamieson to alter her determination of excluding the Cranford ladies, and send notes of invitation all round for a small party on the following Tuesday. Mr. Mulliner himself brought them round. He *would* always ignore the fact of there being a back door to any house, and gave a louder rat-tat than his mistress, Mrs. Jamieson. He had three little notes, which he carried in a
30 large basket, in order to impress his mistress with an idea of their great weight, though they might easily have gone into his waistcoat pocket.

Miss Matty and I quietly decided we would have a previous engagement at home ; but before our answer was written, in came Miss Pole, with an open note in her hand.

“ So ! ” she said. “ Ah, I see you have got your note too.

I could have told my Lady Glenmire she would be glad enough of our society before a fortnight was over."

"Yes," said Miss Matty, "we're asked for Tuesday evening. And perhaps you would just kindly bring your work across and drink tea with us that night. It is my usual regular time for looking over the last week's bills and notes and letters, and making candle-lighters of them; but that does not seem quite reason enough for saying I have a previous engagement at home, though I meant to make it do. Now, if you would come, my conscience would be quite at ease, and luckily the 10 note is not written yet."

I saw Miss Pole's countenance change while Miss Matty was speaking.

"Don't you mean to go, then?" asked she.

"Oh no!" said Miss Matty quietly. "You don't either, I suppose?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Pole. "Yes, I think I do," said she, rather briskly; and on seeing Miss Matty look surprised, she added, "You see, one would not like Mrs. Jamieson to think that anything she could do, or say, was of consequence 20 enough to give offence; it would be a kind of letting down of ourselves, that I, for one, should not like. It would be too flattering to Mrs. Jamieson if we allowed her to suppose that what she had said affected us a week, nay ten days afterwards."

"Well, I suppose it is wrong to be hurt and annoyed so long about anything; and, perhaps, after all, she did not mean to vex us. But I must say, I could not have brought myself to say the things Mrs. Jamieson did about our not calling. I really don't think I shall go."

"Oh, come, Miss Matty, you must go; you know our friend 30 Mrs. Jamieson is much more phlegmatic than most people, and does not enter into the little delicacies of feeling which you possess in so remarkable a degree."

"I thought you possessed them, too, that day Mrs. Jamieson called to tell us not to go," said Miss Matty innocently.

But Miss Pole, in addition to her delicacies of feeling, possessed a very smart cap, which she was anxious to show to an admiring world ; and so she seemed to forget all her angry words uttered not a fortnight before, and to be ready to act on what she called the great Christian principle of "Forgive and forget" ; and she lectured dear Miss Matty so long on this head that she absolutely ended by assuring her it was her duty, as a deceased rector's daughter, to buy a new cap and go to the party at Mrs. Jamieson's. So "we were
10 most happy to accept," instead of "regretting that we were obliged to decline."

And with three new caps, and a greater array of brooches than had ever been seen together at one time since Cranford was a town, did Mrs. Forrester, and Miss Matty, and Miss Pole appear on that memorable Tuesday evening. I counted seven brooches myself on Miss Pole's dress. Two were fixed negligently in her cap (one was a butterfly made of Scotch pebbles, which a vivid imagination might believe to be the real insect) ; one fastened her net neck-kerchief ; one her collar ; one
20 ornamented the front of her gown, midway between her throat and waist ; and another adorned the point of her stomacher. Where the seventh was I have forgotten, but it was somewhere about her, I am sure.

Mrs. Jamieson's drawing-room was cheerful ; the evening sun came streaming into it, and the large square window was clustered round with flowers. Carlo lay on the worsted-worked rug, and ungraciously barked at us as we entered. Mrs. Jamieson stood up, giving us each a torpid smile of welcome, and looking helplessly beyond us at Mr. Mulliner,
30 as if she hoped he would place us in chairs, for, if he did not, she never could. I suppose he thought we could find our way to the circle round the fire, which reminded me of Stonehenge, I don't know why. Lady Glenmire came to the rescue of our hostess, and, somehow or other, we found ourselves for the first time placed agreeably, and not formally, in Mrs. Jamieson's house. Lady Glenmire, now we had time to look

at her, proved to be a bright little woman of middle age, who had been very pretty in the days of her youth, and who was even yet very pleasant-looking. I saw Miss Pole appraising her dress in the first five minutes, and I take her word when she said the next day,—

"My dear, ten pounds would have purchased every stitch she had on—lace and all!"

We were all very silent at first. We were thinking what we could talk about, that should be high enough to interest My Lady. There had been a rise in the price of sugar, which, 10 as preserving-time was near, was a piece of intelligence to all our housekeeping hearts, and would have been the natural topic if Lady Glenmire had not been by. But we were not sure if the peerage ate preserves—much less knew how they were made. At last, Miss Pole, who had always a great deal of courage and *savoir faire*, spoke to Lady Glenmire, who on her part had seemed just as much puzzled to know how to break the silence as we were.

"Has your ladyship been to Court lately?" asked she; and then gave a little glance round at us, half timid 20 and half triumphant, as much as to say, "See how judiciously I have chosen a subject befitting the rank of the stranger."

"I never was there in my life," said Lady Glenmire, with a broad Scotch accent, but in a very sweet voice. And then, as if she had been too abrupt, she added, "We very seldom went to London—only twice, in fact, during all my married life; and before I was married my father had far too large a family to take us often from our home, even to Edinburgh. Ye'll have been in Edinburgh, maybe?" said she, suddenly 30 brightening up with the hope of a common interest. We had none of us been there; but Miss Pole had an uncle who once had passed a night there, which was very pleasant.

Mrs. Jamieson, meanwhile, was absorbed in wonder why Mr. Mulliner did not bring the tea; and at length the wonder oozed out of her mouth.

"I had better ring the bell, my dear, had not I?" said Lady Glenmire briskly.

"No—I think not—Mulliner does not like to be hurried."

We should have liked our tea, for we dined at an earlier hour than Mrs. Jamieson. I suspect Mr. Mulliner had to finish the *St. James's Chronicle* before he chose to trouble himself about tea. His mistress fidgeted and fidgeted, and kept saying, "I can't think why Mulliner does not bring tea. I can't think what he can be about." And Lady Glenmire
10 at last grew quite impatient, but it was a pretty kind of impatience after all; and she rang the bell rather sharply, on receiving a half-permission from her sister-in-law to do so. Mr. Mulliner appeared in dignified surprise. "Oh!" said Mrs. Jamieson, "Lady Glenmire rang the bell; I believe it was for tea."

In a few minutes tea was brought. Very delicate was the china, very old the plate, very thin the bread-and-butter, and very small the lumps of sugar.

After tea we thawed down into common-life subjects. We
20 were thankful to Lady Glenmire for having proposed some more bread-and-butter, and this mutual want made us better acquainted with her than we should ever have been with talking about the Court, though Miss Pole did say she had hoped to know how the dear Queen was from some one who had seen her.

The friendship begun over bread-and-butter extended on to cards. Lady Glenmire played preference to admiration, and was a complete authority as to ombre and quadrille. Even Miss Pole quite forgot to say "my lady," and "your
30 ladyship," and said "Basto, ma'am"; "you have spadille, I believe," just as quietly as if we had never held the great Cranford parliament on the subject of the proper mode of addressing a peeress.

As a proof of how thoroughly we had forgotten that we were in the presence of one who might have sat down to tea with a coronet, instead of a cap, on her head, Mrs. Forrester

related a curious little fact to Lady Glenmire—an anecdote known to the circle of her intimate friends, but of which even Mrs. Jamieson was not aware. It related to some fine old lace, the sole relic of better days, which Lady Glenmire was admiring on Mrs. Forrester's collar.

"Yes," said that lady, "such lace cannot be got now for either love or money; made by the nuns abroad, they tell me. I treasure up my lace very much. I daren't even trust the washing of it to my maid" (the little charity-schoolgirl I have named before, but who sounded well as "my maid"). "I 10 always wash it myself. And once it had a narrow escape. Of course, your ladyship knows that such lace must never be starched or ironed. Some people wash it in sugar and water, and some in coffee, to make it the right yellow colour; but I myself have a very good receipt for washing it in milk, which stiffens it enough, and gives it a very good creamy colour. Well, ma'am, I had tacked it together (and the beauty of this fine lace is that, when it is wet, it goes into a very little space), and put it to soak in milk, when, unfortunately, I left the room; on my return, I found pussy on the table, looking 20 very like a thief, but gulping very uncomfortably, as if she was half-choked with something she wanted to swallow and could not. And, would you believe it? At first I pitied her, and said 'Poor pussy, poor pussy!' till, all at once, I looked and saw the cup of milk empty—cleaned out! 'You naughty cat!' said I; and I believe I was provoked enough to give her a slap, which did no good, but only helped the lace down—just as one slaps a choking child on the back. I could have cried, I was so vexed; but I determined I would not give the lace up without a struggle for it. I hoped the 30 lace might disagree with her, at any rate; but it would have been too much for Job, if he had seen, as I did, that cat come in, quite placid and purring, not a quarter of an hour after, and almost expecting to be stroked. 'No, pussy!' said I, 'if you have any conscience, you ought not to expect that!' And then a thought struck me; and I rang the bell for my

maid, and sent her to Mr. Hoggins, with my compliments, and would he be kind enough to lend me one of his top-boots for an hour ? I did not think there was anything odd in the message ; but Jenny said the young men in the surgery laughed as if they would be ill at my wanting a top-boot. When it came, Jenny and I put pussy in, with her forefeet straight down, so that they were fastened, and could not scratch, and we gave her a teaspoonful of currant jelly, in which (your ladyship must excuse me) I had mixed some
10 tartar emetic. I shall never forget how anxious I was for the next half-hour. I took pussy to my own room, and spread a clean towel on the floor. I could have kissed her when she returned the lace to sight, very much as it had gone down. Jenny had boiling water ready, and we soaked it and soaked it, and spread it on a lavender bush in the sun before I could touch it again, even to put it in milk. But now your ladyship would never guess that it had been in Pussy's inside."

We found out, in the course of the evening, that Lady Glenmire was going to pay Mrs. Jamieson a long visit, as she
20 had given up her apartments in Edinburgh, and had no ties to take her back there in a hurry.

"Don't you find it very unpleasant walking ?" asked Mrs. Jamieson, as our respective servants were announced. It was a pretty regular question from Mrs. Jamieson, who had her own carriage in the coach-house, and always went out in a sedan-chair to the very shortest distances. The answers were nearly as much a matter of course.

"Oh dear, no ! it is so pleasant and still at night !" "Such a refreshment after the excitement of a party !"

30 In our pattens we picked our way home with extra care that night, so refined and delicate were our perceptions after drinking tea with "my lady."

CHAPTER IX

SIGNOR BRUNONI

SOON after the events of which I gave an account in my last paper, I was summoned home by my father's illness ; and for a time I forgot, in anxiety about him, to wonder how my dear friends at Cranford were getting on.

Late in November—when my father was once more in good health—I received a letter from Miss Matty ; and a very mysterious letter it was. She began many sentences without ending them, running them one into another, in much the same confused sort of way in which written words run together on blotting-paper. All I could make out was that, if my 10 father was better (which she hoped he was), and would take warning and wear a greatcoat from Michaelmas to Lady Day, if turbans were in fashion, could I tell her ? Such a piece of gaiety was going to happen as had not been seen or known of since Wombwell's lions came, when one of them ate a little child's arm ; and she was, perhaps, too old to care about dress, but a new cap she must have ; and, having heard that turbans were worn, and some of the county families likely to come, she would like to look tidy, if I would bring her a cap from the milliner I employed ; and oh, dear ! how careless of 20 her to forget that she wrote to beg I would come and pay her a visit next Tuesday ; when she hoped to have something to offer me in the way of amusement, which she would not now more particularly describe, only sea-green was her favourite colour. So she ended her letter ; but in a P.S. she added, she thought she might as well tell me what was the peculiar attraction to Cranford just now ; Signor Brunoni was going to exhibit his wonderful magic in the Cranford Assembly Rooms on Wednesday and Friday evening in the following week.

I was very glad to accept the invitation from my dear Miss 30 Matty, independently of the conjuror, and most particularly

anxious to prevent her from disfiguring her small, gentle, mousey face with a great Saracen's head turban ; and accordingly I brought her a pretty, neat, middle-aged cap, which, however, was rather a disappointment to her when, on my arrival, she followed me into my bedroom, ostensibly to poke the fire, but in reality, I do believe, to see if the sea-green turban was not inside the cap-box with which I had travelled. It was in vain that I twirled the cap round on my hand to exhibit back and side fronts : her heart had been set upon a
10 turban, and all she could do was to say, with resignation in her look and voice,—

“ I am sure you did your best, my dear. It is just like the caps all the ladies in Cranford are wearing, and they have had theirs for a year, I dare say. I should have liked something newer, I confess—something more like the turbans Miss Betty Barker tells me Queen Adelaide wears ; but it is very pretty, my dear. And I dare say lavender will wear better than sea-green. Well, after all, what is dress, that we should care about it ? You'll tell me if you want anything, my dear.
20 Here is the bell. I suppose turbans have not got down to Drumble yet ? ”

So saying, the dear old lady gently bemoaned herself out of the room, leaving me to dress for the evening, when, as she informed me, she expected Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester, and she hoped I should not feel myself too much tired to join the party. Of course, I should not ; and I made some haste to unpack and arrange my dress ; but, with all my speed, I heard the arrivals and the buzz of conversation in the next room before I was ready. Just as I opened the door, I caught
30 the words, “ I was foolish to expect anything very genteel out of the Drumble shops ; poor girl ! she did her best, I've no doubt.” But, for all that, I had rather that she blamed Drumble and me than disfigured herself with a turban.

Miss Pole was always the person, in the trio of Cranford ladies now assembled, to have had adventures. And now, by the expressive way in which she cleared her throat, and waited

for all minor subjects (such as caps and turbans) to be cleared off the course, we knew she had something very particular to relate. Miss Pole began,—

“As I was stepping out of Gordon’s shop to-day, I chanced to go into the ‘George’ (my Betty has a second-cousin who is chambermaid there, and I thought Betty would like to hear how she was), and, not seeing any one about, I strolled up the staircase, and found myself in the passage leading to the Assembly Room ; so I went on, not thinking of what I was about, when, all at once, I perceived that I was in the 10 middle of the preparations for to-morrow night—the room being divided with great clothes-maids, over which Crosby’s men were tacking red flannel ; very dark and odd it seemed ; it quite bewildered me, and I was going on behind the screens, in my absence of mind, when a gentleman stepped forwards and asked if I had any business he could arrange for me. He spoke such pretty broken English ; and while I was busy picturing his past life to myself, he had bowed me out of the room. I was going downstairs, when who should I meet but Betty’s second-cousin. So, of course, I stopped to 20 speak to her for Betty’s sake ; and she told me that I had really seen the conjurer—the gentleman who spoke broken English was Signor Brunoni himself.”

Miss Pole, then, had seen the conjurer—the real, live conjurer ! In short, Miss Pole was the heroine of the evening.

Conjuration, sleight of hand, magic, witchcraft, were the subjects of the evening. Miss Pole was slightly sceptical, and inclined to think there might be a scientific solution found for even the proceedings of the Witch of Endor. Mrs. Forrester believed everything, from ghosts to death-watches. 30 Miss Matty ranged between the two—always convinced by the last speaker.

After tea, I was dispatched downstairs into the dining-parlour for that volume of the old Encyclopædia which contained the nouns beginning with C, in order that Miss Pole might prime herself with scientific explanations for the tricks

of the following evening. It spoilt the pool at preference which Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester had been looking forward to, for Miss Pole became so absorbed in her subject, and the plates by which it was illustrated, that we felt it would be cruel to disturb her otherwise than by one or two well-timed yawns, which I threw in now and then, for I was really touched by the meek way in which the two ladies were bearing their disappointment. But Miss Pole only read the more zealously, imparting to us no more interesting information than this,—

- 10 “ Ah ! I see ; I comprehend perfectly. A represents the ball. Put A between B and D—no ! between C and F, and turn the second joint of the third finger of your left hand over the wrist of your right H. Very clear indeed ! My dear Mrs. Forrester, conjuring and witchcraft is a mere affair of the alphabet. Do let me read you this one passage ! ”

- Mrs. Forrester implored Miss Pole to spare her, saying, from a child upwards, she never could understand being read aloud to ; and I dropped the pack of cards, which I had been shuffling very audibly, and by this discreet movement I
20 obliged Miss Pole to perceive that preference was to have been the order of the evening, and to propose, rather unwillingly, that the pool should commence. The pleasant brightness that stole over the other two ladies' faces on this ! Miss Matty had one or two twinges of self-reproach for having interrupted Miss Pole in her studies ; and did not remember her cards well, or give her full attention to the game, until she had soothed her conscience by offering to lend the volume of the *Encyclopædia* to Miss Pole, who accepted it thankfully, and said Betty should take it home when she came with the lantern.

- 30 The next evening we were all in a little gentle flutter at the idea of the gaiety before us. Miss Matty went up to dress betimes, and hurried me until I was ready, when we found we had an hour and a half to wait before the “ doors opened at seven precisely.” And we had only twenty yards to go ! However, as Miss Matty said, it would not do to get too much absorbed in anything, and forget the time ; so she thought

we had better sit quietly, without lighting the candles, till five minutes to seven. So Miss Matty dozed, and I knitted.

At length we set off ; and at the door, under the carriage way at the "George," we met Mrs. Forrester and Miss Pole : the latter was discussing the subject of the evening with more vehemence than ever, and throwing A's and B's at our heads like hailstones. She had even copied one or two of the "receipts"—as she called them—for the different tricks, on backs of letters, ready to explain and to detect Signor Brunoni's arts.

10

We stopped short at the second front row ; I could hardly understand why, until I heard Miss Pole ask a stray waiter if any of the county families were expected ; and when he shook his head, and believed not, Mrs. Forrester and Miss Matty moved forwards, and our party represented a conversational square. The front row was soon augmented and enriched by Lady Glenmire and Mrs. Jamieson. We six occupied the two front rows, and our aristocratic seclusion was respected by the groups of shopkeepers who strayed in from time to time and huddled together on the back benches. 20

At length the curtain quivered—one side went up before the other, which stuck fast ; it was dropped again, and, with a fresh effort, and a vigorous pull from some unseen hand, it flew up, revealing to our sight a magnificent gentleman in the Turkish costume, seated before a little table, gazing at us with calm and condescending dignity, "like a being of another sphere," as I heard a sentimental voice ejaculate behind me.

"That's not Signor Brunoni !" said Miss Pole decidedly : and so audibly that I am sure he heard, for he glanced down over his flowing beard at our party with an air of mute reproach. "Signor Brunoni had no beard—but perhaps he'll come soon." So she lulled herself into patience. Meanwhile, Miss Matty had reconnoitred through her eyeglass, wiped it, and looked again. Then she turned round, and said to me, in a kind, mild, sorrowful tone,—

"You see, my dear, turbans *are* worn."

But we had no time for more conversation. The Grand Turk, as Miss Pole chose to call him, arose and announced himself as Signor Brunoni.

"I don't believe him!" exclaimed Miss Pole, in a defiant manner. He looked at her again, with the same dignified upbraiding in his countenance. "I don't!" she repeated more positively than ever. "Signor Brunoni had not got that muffy sort of thing about his chin, but looked like a close-shaved Christian gentleman."

10 Miss Pole's energetic speeches had the good effect of wakening up Mrs. Jamieson, who opened her eyes wide—a proceeding which silenced Miss Pole and encouraged the Grand Turk to proceed.

Now we were astonished. How he did his tricks I could not imagine; no, not even when Miss Pole pulled out her pieces of paper and began reading aloud—or, at least, in a very audible whisper—the separate "receipts" for the most common of his tricks. If ever I saw a man frown and look enraged, I saw the Grand Turk frown at Miss Pole; but, as
20 she said, what could be expected but unchristian looks from a Mussulman? If Miss Pole were sceptical, and more engrossed with her receipts and diagrams than with his tricks, Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester were mystified and perplexed to the highest degree. Mrs. Jamieson kept taking her spectacles off and wiping them, as if she thought it was something defective in them which made the legerdemain; and Lady Glenmire, who had seen many curious sights in Edinburgh, was very much struck with the tricks, and would not at all agree with Miss Pole, who declared that anybody could do them with a
30 little practice, and that she would, herself, undertake to do all he did, with two hours given to study the Encyclopædia, and make her third finger flexible.

At last Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester became perfectly awestricken. They whispered together. I sat just behind them, so I could not help hearing what they were saying. Miss Matty asked Mrs. Forrester "if she thought it was quite

right to have come to see such things ? She could not help fearing they were lending encouragement to something that was not quite—— ” A little shake of the head filled up the blank. Mrs. Forrester replied, that the same thought had crossed her mind ; she, too, was feeling very uncomfortable, it was so very strange. She was quite certain that it was her pocket-handkerchief which was in that loaf just now ; and it had been in her own hand not five minutes before. She wondered who had furnished the bread ? She was sure it could not be Dakin, because he was the churchwarden. 10 Suddenly Miss Matty half-turned towards me,—

“ Will you look, my dear—you are a stranger in the town, and it won't give rise to unpleasant reports—will you just look round and see if the rector is here ? If he is, I think we may conclude that this wonderful man is sanctioned by the Church, and that will be a great relief to my mind.”

I looked, and I saw the tall, thin, dry, dusty rector, sitting surrounded by National School boys, guarded by troops of his own sex from any approach of the many Cranford spinsters. His kind face was all agape with broad smiles, and 20 the boys around him were in chinks of laughing. I told Miss Matty that the Church was smiling approval, which set her mind at ease.

CHAPTER X

THE PANIC

I THINK a series of circumstances dated from Signor Brunoni's visit to Cranford, which seemed at the time connected in our minds with him, though I don't know that he had anything really to do with them. There were one or two robberies, and that seemed to make us all afraid of being robbed ; and for a long time, at Miss Matty's, I know, we used to make a regular expedition all round the kitchens and cellars every 30 night, Miss Matty leading the way, armed with the poker, I

following with the hearth-brush, and Martha carrying the shovel and fire-irons with which to sound the alarm ; and by the accidental hitting together of them she often frightened us so much that we bolted ourselves up, all three together,



A REGULAR EXPEDITION.

in the back kitchen, or storeroom, or wherever we happened to be, till, when our affright was over, we recollected ourselves, and set out afresh with double valiance.

Miss Pole affected great bravery, but we discovered that she had begged one of Mr. Hoggins's worn-out hats to hang

up in her lobby. Miss Matty made no secret of being an arrant coward, but she went regularly through her housekeeper's duty of inspection—only the hour for this became earlier and earlier, till at last we went the rounds at half-past six, and Miss Matty adjourned to bed soon after seven, "in order to get the night over the sooner."

One afternoon, about five o'clock, we were startled by a hasty knock at the door. Miss Matty bade me run and tell Martha on no account to open the door till she (Miss Matty) had reconnoitred through the window; and she armed herself 10 with a footstool to drop down on the head of the visitor, in case he should show a face covered with black crape, as he looked up in answer to her inquiry of who was there. But it was nobody but Miss Pole and Betty. The former came upstairs, carrying a little hand-basket, and she was evidently in a state of great agitation.

"Take care of that!" said she to me, as I offered to relieve her of her basket. "It's my plate. I am sure there is a plan to rob my house to-night. I am come to throw myself on your hospitality, Miss Matty. Betty is going to sleep with 20 her cousin at the "George." I can sit up here all night if you will allow me; but my house is so far from any neighbours, and I don't believe we could be heard if we screamed ever so!"

"But," said Miss Matty, "what has alarmed you so much? Have you seen any men lurking about the house?"

"Oh yes!" answered Miss Pole. "Two very bad-looking men have gone three times past the house, very slowly; and an Irish beggar-woman came not half an hour ago, and all but forced herself in past Betty, saying her children were 30 starving, and she must speak to the mistress. You see, she said 'mistress,' though there was a hat hanging up in the hall, and it would have been more natural to have said 'master.' But Betty shut the door in her face, and came up to me, and we got the spoons together, and sat in the parlour window watching till we saw Thomas Jones going from his work, when

we called to him and asked him to take care of us into the town."

We might have triumphed over Miss Pole, who had professed such bravery until she was frightened; but we were too glad to perceive that she shared in the weaknesses of humanity to exult over her; and I gave up my room to her very willingly, and shared Miss Matty's bed for the night.

We parted with an awe-stricken wonder as to what we should hear of in the morning.

10 But until Lady Glenmire came to call next day, we heard of nothing unusual. The kitchen fire-irons were in exactly the same position against the back door as when Martha and I had skilfully piled them up, like spillikins, ready to fall with an awful clatter if only a cat had touched the outside panels.

When Lady Glenmire came, we almost felt jealous of her. Mrs. Jamieson's house had really been attacked; at least there were men's footsteps to be seen on the flower borders, underneath the kitchen windows, "where nae men should be"; and Carlo had barked all through the night as if
20 strangers were abroad. Mrs. Jamieson had been awakened by Lady Glenmire, and they had rung the bell which communicated with Mr. Mulliner's room in the third story, and when his night-capped head had appeared over the banisters, in answer to the summons, they had told him of their alarm, and the reasons for it; whereupon he retreated into his bedroom, and locked the door (for fear of draughts, as he informed them in the morning), and opened the window, and called out valiantly to say, if the supposed robbers would come to him he would fight them; but, as Lady Glenmire
30 observed, that was but poor comfort, since they would have to pass by Mrs. Jamieson's room and her own before they could reach him, and must be of a very pugnacious disposition indeed if they neglected the opportunities of robbery presented by the unguarded lower stories, to go up to a garret, and there force a door in order to get at the champion of the house. Lady Glenmire, after waiting and listening for some time in

the drawing-room, had proposed to Mrs. Jamieson that they should go to bed ; but that lady said she should not feel comfortable unless she sat up and watched ; and, accordingly, she packed herself warmly up on the sofa, where she was found by the housemaid, when she came into the room at six o'clock, fast asleep ; but Lady Glenmire went to bed, and kept awake all night.

When Miss Pole heard of this, she nodded her head in great satisfaction. She had been sure we should hear of something happening in Cranford that night ; and we had 10 heard. It was clear enough they had first proposed to attack her house ; but when they saw that she and Betty were on their guard, and had carried off the plate, they had changed their tactics and gone to Mrs. Jamieson's, and no one knew what might have happened if Carlo had not barked, like a good dog as he was !

Poor Carlo ! his barking days were nearly over. Whether the gang who infested the neighbourhood were afraid of him, or whether they were revengeful enough for the way in which he had baffled them on the night in question to poison him ; 20 or whether, as some among the more uneducated people thought, he died of apoplexy, brought on by too much feeding and too little exercise ; at any rate, it is certain that, two days after this eventful night, Carlo was found dead, with his poor little legs stretched out stiff in the attitude of running, as if by such unusual exertion he could escape the sure pursuer, Death.

We were all sorry for Carlo, the old familiar friend who had snapped at us for so many years ; and the mysterious mode of his death made us very uncomfortable. 30

Mrs. Jamieson felt it as she had felt no event since her husband's death ; one thing was clear—it was necessary for Mrs. Jamieson to have some change of scene ; and Mr. Mulliner was very impressive on this point, shaking his head whenever we inquired after his mistress, and speaking of her loss of appetite and bad nights very ominously.

Lady Glenmire (who had evidently taken very kindly to Cranford) did not like the idea of Mrs. Jamieson's going to Cheltenham, and more than once insinuated pretty plainly that it was Mr. Mulliner's doing, who had been much alarmed on the occasion of the house being attacked, and since had said, more than once, that he felt it a very responsible charge to have to defend so many women. Be that as it might, Mrs. Jamieson went to Cheltenham, escorted by Mr. Mulliner ; and Lady Glenmire remained in possession of the house, her
10 ostensible office being to take care that the maid-servants did not pick up followers.

If Miss Pole was delighted to recount the events of that afternoon to all inquirers, others were not so proud of their adventures in the robbery line. Mr. Hoggins, the surgeon, had been attacked at his own door by two ruffians, and robbed in the interval between ringing his bell and the servant's answering it. Miss Pole went the very day she heard the report to have her teeth examined, and to question Mr. Hoggins. She came to us afterwards ; so we heard what
20 she had heard, straight and direct from the source, while we were yet in the excitement and flutter of the agitation caused by the first intelligence ; for the event had only occurred the night before.

" Well ! " said Miss Pole, sitting down with the decision of a person who has made up her mind as to the nature of life and the world, " well, Miss Matty, men will be men. Every mother's son of them wishes to be considered Samson and Solomon rolled into one, too wise ever to be outwitted. If you will notice, they have always foreseen events, though
30 they never tell one for one's warning before the events happen. My father was a man, and I know the sex pretty well."

" Now, only think," said she. " There, I have undergone the risk of having one of my remaining teeth drawn and, after all, Mr. Hoggins is too much of a man to own that he was robbed last night."

" Not robbed ! " exclaimed the chorus.

"Don't tell me!" Miss Pole exclaimed. "I believe he was robbed, just as Betty told me, and he is ashamed to own it; and, to be sure, it was very silly of him to be robbed just at his own door; I dare say he feels that such a thing won't raise him in the eyes of Cranford society, and is anxious to conceal it—but he need not have tried to impose upon me, by saying I must have heard an exaggerated account of some petty theft of a neck of mutton, which, it seems, was stolen out of the safe in his yard last week; he had the impertinence to add, he believed that that was taken by the cat. 10

After we had duly condemned the want of candour which Mr. Hoggins had evinced, and abused men in general, taking him for the representative and type, we got round to the subject about which we had been talking when Miss Pole came in—namely, how far, in the present disturbed state of the country, we could venture to accept an invitation which Miss Matty had just received from Mrs. Forrester, to come as usual and keep the anniversary of her wedding-day by drinking tea with her at five o'clock, and playing a quiet pool afterwards. Mrs. Forrester had said that she asked us with some diffidence, because the roads were, she feared, very unsafe. But she suggested that perhaps one of us would not object to take the sedan, and that the others, by walking briskly, might keep up with the long trot of the chairmen, and so we might all arrive safely at Over Place, a small cluster of houses separated from Cranford by about two hundred yards of a dark and lonely lane. There was no doubt but that a similar note was awaiting Miss Pole at home; so her call was a very fortunate affair, as it enabled us to consult together. . . . We would all much rather have declined this invitation; but 20 we felt that it would not be quite kind to Mrs. Forrester, who would otherwise be left to a solitary retrospect of her not very happy or fortunate life. Miss Matty and Miss Pole had been visitors on this occasion for many years, and now they gallantly determined to nail their colours to the mast, and to go through Darkness Lane rather than fail in loyalty to their friend.

But when the evening came, Miss Matty (for it was she who was voted into the chair, as she had a cold), before being shut down in the sedan, like jack-in-a-box, implored the chairmen, whatever might befall, not to run away and leave her fastened up there, to be murdered ; and even after they had promised, I saw her tighten her features into the stern determination of a martyr, and she gave me a melancholy and ominous shake of the head through the glass. However, we got there safely, only rather out of breath, for it was who
10 could trot hardest through Darkness Lane, and I am afraid poor Miss Matty was sadly jolted.

Mrs. Forrester had made extra preparations, in acknowledgment of our exertion in coming to see her through such dangers. The usual forms of genteel ignorance as to what her servants might send up were all gone through ; and harmony and preference seemed likely to be the order of the evening, but for an interesting conversation that began I don't know how, but which had relation, of course, to the robbers who infested the neighbourhood of Cranford.

20 Having braved the dangers of Darkness Lane, and thus having a little stock of reputation for courage, we began to relate our individual fears, and the private precautions we each of us took. I saw Miss Matty nerving herself up for a confession ; and at last out it came. She owned that, ever since she had been a girl, she had dreaded being caught by her last leg, just as she was getting into bed, by some one concealed under it. She said, when she was younger and more active, she used to take a flying leap from a distance, and so bring both her legs up safely into bed at once ; but
30 that this had always annoyed Deborah, who piqued herself upon getting into bed gracefully, and she had given it up in consequence. So she had bethought herself of something—perhaps I had noticed that she had told Martha to buy her a penny ball, such as children play with—and now she rolled this ball under the bed every night : if it came out on the other side, well and good ; if not, she always took care to have

her hand on the bell-rope, and meant to call out John and Harry, just as if she expected men-servants to answer her ring.

We all applauded this ingenious contrivance, and Miss Matty sank back into satisfied silence, with a look at Mrs. Forrester as if to ask for *her* private weakness.

Mrs. Forrester paused, and stirred the fire, and snuffed the candles, and then she said, in a sounding whisper,—

“ Ghosts ! ”

She looked at Miss Pole, as much as to say, she had declared 10 it, and would stand by it. Such a look was a challenge in itself. Miss Pole came down upon her with indigestion, spectral illusions, optical delusions, and a great deal besides. Miss Matty had rather a leaning to ghosts, as I have mentioned before, and what little she did say was all on Mrs. Forrester's side, who, emboldened by sympathy, protested that ghosts were a part of her religion ; that surely she, the widow of a major in the Army, knew what to be frightened at, and what not ; in short, I never saw Mrs. Forrester so warm either before or since, for she was a gentle, meek, enduring old lady 20 in most things. Not all the elder-wine that ever was mulled could this night wash out the remembrance of this difference between Miss Pole and her hostess. Indeed, when the elder-wine was brought in, it gave rise to a new burst of discussion ; for Jenny, the little maiden who staggered under the tray, had to give evidence of having seen a ghost with her own eyes, not so many nights ago, in Darkness Lane, the very lane we were to go through on our way home.

A lady all in white, and without her head, was what she deposed and adhered to, supported by a consciousness of the 30 secret sympathy of her mistress under the withering scorn with which Miss Pole regarded her. Mrs. Forrester looked at us with an air of conscious triumph ; but then she had not to pass through Darkness Lane before she could bury herself beneath her own familiar bed-clothes.

We preserved a discreet silence as to the headless lady

while we were putting on our things to go home, for even Miss Pole felt that it was as well not to speak lightly on such subjects, for fear of vexing or insulting that weebegone trunk. At least, so I conjecture ; for, instead of the busy clatter usual in the operation, we tied on our cloaks as sadly as mutes at a funeral. Miss Matty drew the curtains round the windows of the chair to shut out disagreeable sights, and the men (either because they were in spirits that their labours were so nearly ended, or because they were going down hill) set off
10 at such a round and merry pace that it was all Miss Pole and I could do to keep up with them. She had breath for nothing beyond an imploring "Don't leave me !" uttered as she clutched my arm so tightly that I could not have quitted her, ghost or no ghost. What a relief it was when the men, weary of their burden and their quick trot, stopped just where Headingley Causeway branches off from Darkness Lane ! Miss Pole unloosed me, and caught at one of the men,—

"Could not you—could not you take Miss Matty round by
Headingley Causeway ?—the pavement in Darkness Lane
20 jolts so, and she is not very strong."

A smothered voice was heard from the inside of the chair,—

"Oh, pray go on ! What is the matter ? What is the matter ? I will give you sixpence more to go on very fast ; pray don't stop here."

"And I'll give you a shilling," said Miss Pole, with tremulous dignity, "if you'll go by Headingley Causeway."

The two men grunted acquiescence, and took up the chair, and went along the causeway, which certainly answered Miss Pole's kind purpose of saving Miss Matty's bones ; for it was
30 covered with soft, thick mud, and even a fall there would have been easy till the getting up came, when there might have been some difficulty in extrication.

CHAPTER XI

SAMUEL BROWN

THE next morning I met Lady Glenmire and Miss Pole setting out on a long walk to find some old woman who was famous in the neighbourhood for her skill in knitting woollen stockings.

In the afternoon Miss Pole called on Miss Matty to tell her of the adventure they had met with on their morning's walk. They had been perplexed about the exact path which they were to take, and had stopped to inquire at a little wayside public-house. The good woman had asked them to sit down and rest themselves, while she fetched her husband, who could direct them better than she could; and, while they 10 were sitting in the sanded parlour, a little girl came in. They thought that she belonged to the landlady, but, on Mrs. Roberts's return, she told them that the little thing was the only child of a couple who were staying in the house. And then she began a long story, out of which Lady Glenmire and Miss Pole could only gather one or two facts, which were that, about six weeks ago, a light spring cart had broken down just before their door, in which there were two men, one woman, and this child. One of the men was seriously hurt, for he had languished in their house ever since, attended by 20 his wife. Miss Pole had asked what he was, what he looked like. And Mrs. Roberts had made answer that he was not like a gentleman, nor yet like a common person; if it had not been that he and his wife were such decent, quiet people, she could almost have thought he was a mountebank, or something of that kind, for they had a great box in the cart, full of she did not know what.

Miss Pole had begun to have her suspicions at this point, and expressed her idea that it was rather strange that the box and cart and horse and all should have disappeared; but 30 good Mrs. Roberts seemed to have become quite indignant

at Miss Pole's implied suggestion. As the best way of convincing the ladies, she bethought her of begging them to see the wife; and, as Miss Pole said, there was no doubting the honest, worn, bronzed face of the woman, who, at the first tender word from Lady Glenmire, burst into tears, which she was too weak to check until some word from the landlady made her swallow down her sobs, in order that she might testify to the Christian kindness shown by Mr. and Mrs. Roberts. Miss Pole came round to as vehement a belief in the sorrowful tale as she had been sceptical before; nothing daunted when she found out that he was our Signor Brunoni, to whom all Cranford had been attributing all manner of evil this six weeks past! His wife said his proper name was Samuel Brown—"Sam," she called him—but to the last we preferred calling him "the signor"; it sounded so much better.

The end of their conversation with the Signora Brunoni was that it was agreed that he should be placed under medical advice, and for any expense incurred in procuring this Lady Glenmire promised to hold herself responsible, and had accordingly gone to Mr. Hoggins to beg him to ride over to the "Rising Sun" that very afternoon, and examine into the signor's real state; and, as Miss Pole said, if it was desirable to remove him to Cranford to be more immediately under Mr. Hoggins's eye, she would undertake to see for lodgings and arrange about the rent.

The signora told me, one day, a good deal about their lives up to this period.

"Have you been in India?" said I.

30 "Oh yes! many a year, ma'am. Sam was a sergeant in the 31st; and when the regiment was ordered to India, I drew a lot to go, and I was more thankful than I can tell; for it seemed as if it would only be a slow death to me to part from my husband. But, indeed, ma'am, if I had known all, I don't know whether I would not rather have died there and then than gone through what I have done since."

"Poor little Phoebe!" said I, my thoughts going back to the baby.

"Ah! you may say so! I never thought I should have reared her, though, when she fell ill at Chunderabaddad; but that good, kind Aga Jenkyns took us in, which I believe was the very saving of her."

"Jenkyns!" said I.

"Yes, Jenkyns. I shall think all people of that name are kind; for here is that nice old lady who comes every day to take Phoebe a walk!" 10

But an idea had flashed through my head: could the Aga Jenkyns be the lost Peter? True, he was reported by many to be dead. But Miss Matty thought he was alive. I would make further inquiry.

CHAPTER XII

ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED

Was the "poor Peter" of Cranford the Aga Jenkyns of Chunderabaddad, or was he not? As somebody says, that was the question.

I attempted to gain some clear and definite information as to Peter's height, appearance, and when and where he was seen and heard of last. For instance, I remember asking 20 Miss Pole (and I thought the question was very opportune, for I put it when I met her at a call at Mrs. Forrester's, and both the ladies had known Peter, and I imagined that they might refresh each other's memories)—I asked Miss Pole what was the very last thing they had ever heard about him; and then she named the absurd report, about his having been elected Great Lama of Thibet.

The only fact I gained from this conversation was that certainly Peter had last been heard of in India, "or that neighbourhood"; and that this scanty intelligence of his 30 whereabouts had reached Cranford in the year when Miss

Pole had bought her Indian muslin gown, long since worn out (we washed it and mended it, and traced its decline and fall into a window blind before we could go on) ; and in a year when Wombwell came to Cranford, because Miss Matty had wanted to see an elephant in order that she might the better imagine Peter riding on one ; and had seen a boa-constrictor too, which was more than she wished to imagine in her fancy-pictures of Peter's locality.

I suppose all these inquiries of mine, and the consequent
10 curiosity excited in the minds of my friends, made us blind and deaf to what was going on around us. It seemed to me as if the sun rose and shone, and as if the rain rained on Cranford, just as usual, and I did not notice any sign of the times that could be considered as a prognostic of any uncommon event ; and, to the best of my belief, not only Miss Matty and Mrs. Forrester, but even Miss Pole herself, whom we looked upon as a kind of prophetess, from the knack she had of foreseeing things before they came to pass—although she did not like to disturb her friends by telling them her
20 foreknowledge—even Miss Pole herself was breathless with astonishment when she came to tell us of the astounding piece of news.

We were sitting—Miss Matty and I—much as usual, she in the blue chintz easy-chair, with her back to the light, and her knitting in her hand, I reading aloud the *St. James's Chronicle*. A few minutes more, and we should have gone to make the little alterations in dress usual before calling-time (twelve o'clock) in Cranford. We had been talking of the signor's rapid recovery, and praising Mr. Hoggins's skill, and
30 lamenting his want of refinement and manner (it seems a curious coincidence that this should have been our subject, but so it was), when a knock was heard—a caller's knock—three distinct taps—and we were flying to our rooms, to change cap and collars, when Miss Pole arrested us by calling out, as she came up the stairs, " Don't go—I can't wait—it is not twelve, I know—but never mind your dress—I must speak

to you." We did our best to look as if it was not we who had made the hurried movement, the sound of which she had heard ; for, of course, we did not like to have it supposed that we had any old clothes that it was convenient to wear out in the "sanctuary of home," as Miss Jenkyns once prettily called the back parlour, where she was tying up preserves. So we threw our gentility with double force into our manners, and very genteel we were for two minutes while Miss Pole recovered breath, and excited our curiosity strongly by lifting up her hands in amazement, and bringing them down in 10 silence, as if what she had to say was too big for words, and could only be expressed by pantomime.

"What do you think, Miss Matty ? What *do* you think ? Lady Glenmire is to marry—is to be married. I mean—Lady Glenmire—Mr. Hoggins—Mr. Hoggins is going to marry Lady Glenmire !"

"Marry !" said we. "Marry ! Madness !"

"Marry !" said Miss Pole, with the decision that belonged to her character. "*I* said marry ! as you do ; and I also said, 'What a fool my lady is going to make of herself !' 20 I could have said 'Madness !' but I controlled myself, for it was in a public shop that I heard of it. Where feminine delicacy is gone to, I don't know ! You and I, Miss Matty, would have been ashamed to have known that our marriage was spoken of in a grocer's shop, in the hearing of shopmen !"

"But," said Miss Matty, sighing as one recovering from a blow, "perhaps it is not true. Perhaps we are doing her injustice."

"No," said Miss Pole. "I have taken care to ascertain 30 that. I went straight to Mrs. Fitz-Adam, to borrow a cookery book which I knew she had ; and I introduced my congratulations *apropos* of the difficulty gentlemen must have in housekeeping ; and Mrs. Fitz-Adam bridled up, and said that she believed it was true, though how and where I could have heard it she did not know. She said her brother and

Lady Glenmire had come to an understanding at last. 'Understanding!' Such a coarse word! But my lady will have to come down to many a want of refinement. I have reason to believe Mr. Hoggins sups on bread-and-cheese and beer every night."

"Marry!" said Miss Matty once again. "Well! I never thought of it. Two people that we know going to be married. It's coming very near!"

"So near that my heart stopped beating, when I heard
10 of it, while you might have counted twelve," said Miss Pole.

"One does not know whose turn may come next. Here, in Cranford, poor Lady Glenmire might have thought herself safe," said Miss Matty, with a gentle pity in her tones.

I put in my wonder. "But how can she have fancied Mr. Hoggins? I am not surprised that Mr. Hoggins has liked her."

"Oh! I don't know. Mr. Hoggins is rich, and very pleasant-looking," said Miss Matty, "and very good-tempered and kind-hearted."

20 "She has married for an establishment, that's it. I suppose she takes the surgery with it," said Miss Pole, with a little dry laugh at her own joke. But, like many people who think they have made a severe and sarcastic speech, which yet is clever of its kind, she began to relax in her grimness from the moment when she made this allusion to the surgery; and we turned to speculate on the way in which Mrs. Jamieson would receive the news.

Mrs. Forrester surprised us in our darned caps and patched collars; and we forgot all about them in our eagerness to see
30 how she would bear the information, which we honourably left to Miss Pole to impart, although, if we had been inclined to take unfair advantage, we might have rushed in ourselves, for she had a most out-of-place fit of coughing for five minutes after Mrs. Forrester entered the room. I shall never forget the imploring expression of her eyes, as she looked at us over her pocket-handkerchief. They said, as plain as words could

“Don’t let Nature deprive me of the treasure which is mine, although for a time I can make no use of it.” And we did not.

Mrs. Forrester’s surprise was equal to ours; and her sense of injury rather greater, because she had to feel for her order, and saw more fully than we could do how such conduct brought stains on the aristocracy.

When she and Miss Pole left us we endeavoured to subside into calmness; but Miss Matty was really upset by the intelligence she had heard. She reckoned it up, and it was 10 more than fifteen years since she had heard of any of her acquaintance going to be married, with the one exception of Miss Jessie Brown; and, as she said, it gave her quite a shock, and made her feel as if she could not think what would happen next.

None of the ladies in Cranford chose to sanction the marriage by congratulating either of the parties. We wished to ignore the whole affair until our liege lady, Mrs. Jamieson, returned. This restraint upon our tongues was beginning to be irksome, when another direction was given to our thoughts, by an 20 announcement on the part of the principal shopkeeper of Cranford, that the spring fashions were arrived, and would be exhibited on the following Tuesday at his rooms in High Street. Now Miss Matty had been only waiting for this before buying herself a new silk gown. I had offered, it is true, to send to Drumble for patterns, but she had rejected my proposal, gently implying that she had not forgotten her disappointment about the sea-green turban. I was thankful that I was on the spot now, to counteract the dazzling fascination of any yellow or scarlet silk.

CHAPTER XIII

STOPPED PAYMENT

THE very Tuesday morning on which Mr. Johnson was going to show the fashions, the post-woman brought two letters to the house.

Mine was from my father. Miss Matty's was printed. My father's was just a man's letter, and gave no information beyond that he was well, that they had had a good deal of rain, that trade was very stagnant, and there were many disagreeable rumours afloat. He then asked me if I knew whether Miss Matty still retained her shares in the Town and
10 County Bank, as there were very unpleasant reports about it; though nothing more than he had always foreseen, and had prophesied to Miss Jenkyns years ago, when she would invest her little property in it. However, if anything had gone wrong, of course I was not to think of leaving Miss Matty while I could be of use, etc.

"Who is your letter from, my dear? Mine is a very civil invitation, signed 'Edwin Wilson,' asking me to attend an important meeting of the shareholders of the Town and County Bank, to be held in Drumble, on Thursday, the twenty-first.
20 I am sure it is very attentive of them to remember me."

I did not like to hear of this "important meeting," for, though I did not know much about business, I feared it confirmed what my father said: however, I thought, ill news always came fast enough, so I resolved to say nothing about my alarm, and merely told her that my father was well, and sent his kind regards to her. She kept turning over and admiring her letter. At last she spoke,—

"I remember their sending one to Deborah just like this; but that I did not wonder at, for everybody knew she was so
30 clear-headed. I am afraid I could not help them much; indeed, if they came to accounts, I should be quite in the way,

for I never could do sums in my head. Deborah, I know, rather wished to go, and went so far as to order a new bonnet for the occasion : but when the time came she had a bad cold ; so they sent her a very polite account of what they had done. Chosen a director, I think it was. Do you think they want me to help them to choose a director ? I am sure I should choose your father at once."

"My father has no shares in the bank," said I.

"Oh no ! I remember. He objected very much to Deborah's buying any, I believe. But she was quite the 10 woman of business, and always judged for herself ; and here, you see, they have paid eight per cent. all these years."

It was a very uncomfortable subject to me, with my half-knowledge ; so I thought I would change the conversation, and I asked at what time she thought we had better go and see the fashions. "Well, my dear," she said, "the thing is this : it is not etiquette to go till after twelve ; but then, you see, all Cranford will be there. and one does not like to be too curious about dress and trimmings and caps with all the world looking on. So I thought we would just slip down this 20 morning soon after breakfast—for I do want half a pound of tea—and then we could go up and examine the things at our leisure, and see exactly how my new silk gown must be made ; and then, after twelve, we could go with our minds disengaged, and free from thoughts of dress."

We began to talk of Miss Matty's new silk gown.

If a happy 'sea-green could be met with, the gown was to be sea-green : if not, she inclined to maize, and I to silver-gray ; and we discussed the requisite number of breadths until we arrived at the shop-door. We were to buy the tea, 30 select the silk, and then clamber up the iron corkscrew stairs that led into what was once a loft, though now a fashion showroom.

The young men at Mr. Johnson's had on their best looks, and their best cravats, and pivoted themselves over the counter with surprising activity. They wanted to show us

upstairs at once ; but on the principle of business first and pleasure afterwards, we stayed to purchase the tea. By this time the shop was pretty well filled, for it was Cranford market-day : one honest-looking man made his way up to the counter at which we stood, and asked to look at a shawl or two. The other country folk confined themselves to the grocery side ; but our neighbour was evidently too full of some kind intention to be shy ; and it soon became a question with me, whether he or Miss Matty would keep their shopman
10 the longest time. He thought each shawl more beautiful than the last ; and as for Miss Matty, she smiled and sighed over each fresh bale that was brought out.

Now she hovered over a lilac with yellow spots, while I pulled out a quiet sage-green that had faded into insignificance under the more brilliant colours, but which was nevertheless a good silk in its humble way. Our attention was called off to our neighbour. He had chosen a shawl of about thirty shillings' value ; and his face looked broadly happy, under the anticipation, no doubt, of the pleasant surprise he
20 should give at home ; he had tugged a leathern purse out of his breeches-pocket, and had offered a five-pound note in payment for the shawl, and for some parcels which had been brought round to him from the grocery counter ; and it was just at this point that he attracted our notice. The shopman was examining the note with a puzzled, doubtful air.

"Town and County Bank ! I am not sure, sir, but I believe we have received a warning against notes issued by this bank only this morning. I will just step and ask Mr. Johnson, sir ; but I'm afraid I must trouble you for payment
30 in cash, or in a note of a different bank."

I never saw a man's countenance fall so suddenly into dismay and bewilderment. It was almost piteous to see the rapid change.

"Dang it !" said he, striking his fist down on the table, as if to try which was the harder, "the chap talks as if notes and gold were to be had for the picking up."

Miss Matty had forgotten her silk gown in her interest for the man. I don't think she had caught the name of the bank, and in my nervous cowardice I was anxious that she should



OUR NEIGHBOUR.

not ; and so I began admiring the yellow-spotted lilac gown that I had been utterly condemning only a minute before. But it was of no use.

"What bank was it? I mean, what bank did your note belong to?"

"Town and County Bank."

"Let me see it," said she quietly to the shopman, gently taking it out of his hand, as he brought it back to return it to the farmer.

Mr. Johnson was very sorry, but, from information he had received, the notes issued by that bank were little better than waste paper.

10 "I don't understand it," said Miss Matty to me in a low voice. "That is our bank, is it not?—the Town and County Bank?"

"Yes," said I. "This lilac silk will just match the ribbons in your new cap, I believe," I continued, holding up the folds so as to catch the light, and wishing that the man would make haste and be gone, and yet having a new wonder, that had only just sprung up, how far it was wise or right in me to allow Miss Matty to make this expensive purchase, if the affairs of the bank were really so bad as the refusal of the note
20 implied.

But Miss Matty put on the soft, dignified manner peculiar to her, rarely used, and yet which became her so well, and laying her hand gently on mine, she said,—

"Never mind the silks for a few minutes, dear. I don't understand you, sir," turning now to the shopman, who had been attending to the farmer. "Is this a forged note?"

"Oh no, ma'am. It is a true note of its kind; but you see, ma'am, it is a joint-stock bank, and there are reports out that it is likely to break. Mr. Johnson is only doing his duty,
30 ma'am, as I am sure Mr. Dobson knows."

But Mr. Dobson was turning the note absently over in his fingers, looking gloomily enough at the parcel containing the lately-chosen shawl.

"It's hard upon a poor man," said he, "as earns every farthing with the sweat of his brow. However, there's no help for it. You must take back your shawl, my man;

Lizzie must do on with her cloak for a while. And yon figs for the little ones—I promised them to 'em—I'll take them ; but the 'bacco, and the other things —— ”

“ I will give you five sovereigns for your note, my good man,” said Miss Matty. “ I think there is some great mistake about it, for I am one of the shareholders, and I'm sure they would have told me if things had not been going on right.”

The shopman whispered a word or two across the table to Miss Matty. She looked at him with a dubious air.

“ Perhaps so,” said she. “ But I don't pretend to under- 10
stand business ; I only know that if it is going to fail, and if honest people are to lose their money because they have taken our notes—I can't explain myself,” said she, suddenly becoming aware that she had got into a long sentence with four people for audience ; “ only I would rather exchange my gold for the note, if you please,” turning to the farmer, “ and then you can take your wife the shawl.—It is only going without my gown a few days longer,” she continued, speaking to me. “ Then, I have no doubt, everything will be cleared up.”

“ But if it is cleared up the wrong way ? ” said I. 20

“ Why, then it will only have been common honesty in me, as a shareholder, to have given this good man the money. I am quite clear about it in my own mind ; but, you know, I can never speak quite as comprehensibly as others can ; only you must give me your note, Mr. Dobson, if you please, and go on with your purchases with these sovereigns.”

The man looked at her with silent gratitude—too awkward to put his thanks into words ; but he hung back for a minute or two, fumbling with his note.

“ I'm loath to make another one lose instead of me, if it 30
is a loss ; but, you see, five pounds is a deal of money to a man with a family ; and, as you say, ten to one in a day or two the note will be as good as gold again.”

“ No hope of that, my friend,” said the shopman.

“ The more reason why I should take it,” said Miss Matty quietly. She pushed her sovereigns towards the man, who

slowly laid his note down in exchange. "Thank you. I will wait a day or two before I purchase any of these silks ; perhaps you will then have a greater choice. My dear, will you come upstairs ? "

We inspected the fashions with as minute and curious an interest as if the gown to be made after them had been bought. I could not see that the little event in the shop below had in the least damped Miss Matty's curiosity as to the make of sleeves or the sit of skirts.

10 As we came down through the shop, Mr. Johnson was awaiting us ; he wished to condole with Miss Matty, and impress upon her the true state of the case. I was glad that Miss Matty seemed still a little incredulous ; but I could not tell how much of this was real or assumed.

Somehow, after twelve o'clock, we both acknowledged to a sated curiosity about the fashions, and to a certain fatigue of body (which was, in fact, depression of mind) that indisposed us to go out again.

We had neither of us much appetite for dinner, though
20 we tried to talk cheerfully about indifferent things. When we returned into the drawing-room, Miss Matty unlocked her desk and began to look over her account-books. By-and-by she shut the book, locked her desk, and came and drew a chair to mine. I stole my hand into hers ; she clasped it, but did not speak a word. At last she said, with forced composure in her voice, "If that bank goes wrong, I shall lose one hundred and forty-nine pounds, thirteen shillings and fourpence a year ; I shall only have thirteen pounds a year left." I squeezed her hand hard and tight. I did not
30 know what to say. Presently I felt her fingers work convulsively in my grasp ; and I knew she was going to speak again. I heard the sobs in her voice as she said, "I hope it's not wrong—not wicked—but, oh ! I am so glad poor Deborah is spared this. She could not have borne to come down in the world—she had such a noble, lofty spirit."

This was all she said about the sister who had

insisted upon investing their little property in that unlucky bank.

That night, after Miss Matty went to bed, I treacherously lighted the candle again, and sat down in the drawing-room to compose a letter to the Aga Jenkyns, a letter which should affect him if he were Peter, and yet seem a mere statement of dry facts if he were a stranger. The church clock pealed out two before I had done.

The next morning news came, both official and otherwise, that the Town and County Bank had stopped payment. 10 Miss Matty was ruined.

She tried to speak quietly to me ; but when she came to the actual fact that she would have but about five shillings a week to live upon, she could not restrain a few tears.

"I am not crying for myself, dear," said she, wiping them away ; "I believe I am crying for the very silly thought of how my mother would grieve if she could know ; she always cared for us so much more than for herself. But many a poor person has less, and I am not very extravagant, and, thank God, when the neck of mutton, and Martha's wages, 20 and the rent are paid, I have not a farthing owing. Poor Martha ! I think she'll be sorry to leave me."

Miss Matty smiled at me through her tears, and she would fain have had me see only the smile, not the tears.

CHAPTER XIV

FRIENDS IN NEED

It was an example to me, and I fancy it might be to many others, to see how immediately Miss Matty set about the retrenchment which she knew to be right under her altered circumstances. While she went down to speak to Martha, and break the intelligence to her, I stole out with my letter to the Aga Jenkyns, and went to the signor's lodgings to 30

obtain the exact address. I hastened home, that Miss Matty might not miss me. Martha opened the door to me, her face swollen with crying. As soon as she saw me she burst out afresh, and taking hold of my arm she pulled me in, and banged the door to, in order to ask me if indeed it was all true that Miss Matty had been saying.

"I'll never leave her! No; I won't. I telled her so, and said I could not think how she could find in her heart to give me warning."

10 "But, Martha," said I, cutting in while she wiped her eyes.

"Don't 'but Martha' me," she replied to my deprecatory tone.

"Listen to reason——"

"I'll not listen to reason," she said. "Reason always means what some one else has got to say. Now I think what I've got to say is good enough reason; but reason or not, I'll say it, and I'll stick to it. I've money in the Savings Bank, and I've a good stock of clothes, and I'm not going to leave Miss Matty. No, not if she gives me warning every
20 hour in the day!"

She put her arms akimbo, as much as to say she defied me; and, indeed, I could hardly tell how to begin to remonstrate with her, so much did I feel that Miss Matty, in her increasing infirmity, needed the attendance of this kind and faithful woman.

"Well ——" said I at last.

"I'm thankful you begin with 'well!' If you'd ha' begun with 'but,' as you did afore, I'd not ha' listened to you. Now you may go on."

30 "I know you would be a great loss to Miss Matty, Martha ——"

"I telled her so. A loss she'd never cease to be sorry for," broke in Martha triumphantly.

"Still, she will have so little—so very little—to live upon, that I don't see just now how she could find you food—she will even be pressed for her own."

Apparently this was even a blacker view of the subject than Miss Matty had presented to her, for Martha just sat down on the first chair that came to hand, and cried out loud (we had been standing in the kitchen).

At last she put her apron down, and looking me earnestly in the face, asked, "Was that the reason Miss Matty wouldn't order a pudding to-day? She said she had no great fancy for sweet things, and you and she would just have a mutton chop. But I'll be up to her. Never you tell, but I'll make her a pudding, and a pudding she'll like too, and I'll pay for 10 it myself; so mind you see she eats it. Many a one has been comforted in their sorrow by seeing a good dish come upon the table."

I was rather glad that Martha's energy had taken the immediate and practical direction of pudding-making, for it staved off the quarrelsome discussion as to whether she should or should not leave Miss Matty's service. She began to tie on a clean apron, and otherwise prepare herself for going to the shop for the butter, eggs, and what else she might require. She would not use a scrap of the articles already in the 20 house for her cookery, but went to an old teapot in which her private store of money was deposited, and took out what she wanted.

I found Miss Matty very quiet, and not a little sad; but by-and-by she tried to smile for my sake. It was settled that I was to write to my father, and ask him to come over and hold a consultation, and as soon as this letter was dispatched we began to talk over future plans. Miss Matty's idea was to take a single room, and retain as much of her furniture as would be necessary to fit up this, and sell the 30 rest, and there to quietly exist upon what would remain after paying the rent. For my part, I was more ambitious and less contented. I thought of all the things by which a woman past middle age, and with the education common to ladies fifty years ago, could earn or add to a living without materially losing caste.

I pondered and pondered until dinner was announced by Martha, with a face all blubbered and swollen with crying.

I had forgotten to tell Miss Matty about the pudding, and I was afraid she might not do justice to it, for she had evidently very little appetite this day ; so I seized the opportunity of letting her into the secret while Martha took away the meat. Miss Matty's eyes filled with tears, and she could not speak, either to express surprise or delight, when Martha returned
10 bearing it aloft, made in the most wonderful representation of a lion *couchant* that ever was moulded. Martha's face gleamed with triumph as she set it down before Miss Matty with an exultant "There !" Miss Matty wanted to speak her thanks, but could not ; so she took Martha's hand and shook it warmly, which set Martha off crying, and I myself could hardly keep up the necessary composure. Martha burst out of the room, and Miss Matty had to clear her voice once or twice before she could speak. At last she said, "I should like to keep this pudding under a glass shade, my dear !"
20 and the notion of the lion *couchant*, with his currant eyes, being hoisted up to the place of honour on a mantelpiece, tickled my hysterical fancy, and I began to laugh, which rather surprised Miss Matty.

"I am sure, dear, I have seen uglier things under a glass shade before now," said she.

So had I, many a time and oft, and I accordingly composed my countenance (and now I could hardly keep from crying), and we both fell to upon the pudding, which was indeed excellent—only every morsel seemed to choke us, our hearts
30 were so full.

We had too much to think about to talk much that afternoon. It passed over very tranquilly. But when the tea-urn was brought in a thought came into my head. Why should not Miss Matty sell tea—be an agent to the East India Tea Company, which then existed ? I could see no objections to this plan, while the advantages were many—always

supposing that Miss Matty could get over the degradation of condescending to anything like trade.

While I was giving but absent answers to the questions Miss Matty was putting—almost as absently—we heard a clumping sound on the stairs, and a whispering outside the door, which indeed once opened and shut as if by some invisible agency. After a little while Martha came in, dragging after her a great tall young man, all crimson with shyness, and finding his only relief in perpetually sleeking down his hair. 10

“Please, ma’am, he’s only Jem Hearn,” said Martha, by way of an introduction; and so out of breath was she that I imagine she had had some bodily struggle before she could overcome his reluctance to be presented on the courtly scene of Miss Matilda Jenkyns’s drawing-room.

“And please, ma’am, he wants to marry me off-hand. And please, ma’am, we want to take a lodger—just one quiet lodger, to make our two ends meet; and we’d take any house comfortable; and, oh dear Miss Matty, if I may be so bold, would you have any objections to lodging with us? Jem 20 wants it as much as I do.”—To Jem: “You great oaf! why can’t you back me?—But he does want it all the same, very bad—don’t you, Jem?—only, you see, he’s dazed at being called on to speak before quality.”

“It’s not that,” broke in Jem. “It’s that you’ve taken me all on a sudden, and I didn’t think for to get married so soon—and such quick work does flabbergast a man. It’s not that I’m against it, ma’am” (addressing Miss Matty), “only Martha has such quick ways with her when once she takes a thing into her head; and marriage, ma’am—marriage nails 30 a man, as one may say. I dare say I shan’t mind it after it’s once over.”

“Please, ma’am,” said Martha—who had plucked at his sleeve, and nudged him with her elbow, and otherwise tried to interrupt him all the time he had been speaking—“don’t mind him, he’ll come to; ’twas only last night he was an-axing

me, and an-axing me, and all the more because I said I could not think of it for years to come, and now he's only taken aback with the suddenness of the joy ; but you know, Jem, you are just as full as me about wanting a lodger." (Another great nudge.)

"Ay ! if Miss Matty would lodge with us—otherwise I've no mind to be cumbered with strange folk in the house," said Jem, with a want of tact which I could see enraged Martha, who was trying to represent a lodger as the great
10 object they wished to obtain, and that, in fact, Miss Matty would be smoothing their path and conferring a favour, if she would only come and live with them.

Miss Matty herself was bewildered by the pair ; their, or rather Martha's sudden resolution in favour of matrimony staggered her, and stood between her and the contemplation of the plan which Martha had at heart. Miss Matty began,—

"Marriage is a very solemn thing, Martha."

"It is indeed, ma'am," quoth Jem. "Not that I've no objections to Martha."

20 "You've never let me a-be for asking me for to fix when I would be married," said Martha—her face all afire, and ready to cry with vexation—"and now you're shaming me before my missus and all."

"Nay, now ! Martha, don't 'ee ! don't 'ee ! only a man likes to have breathing time," said Jem, trying to possess himself of her hand, but in vain. Then seeing that she was more seriously hurt than he had imagined, he seemed to try to rally his scattered faculties, and with more straightforward dignity than, ten minutes before, I should have thought it possible
30 for him to assume, he turned to Miss Matty, and said, "I hope ma'am, you know that I am bound to respect every one who has been kind to Martha. I always looked on her as to be my wife—some time ; and she has often and often spoken of you as the kindest lady that ever was ; and though the plain truth is, I would not like to be troubled with lodgers of the common run, yet if, ma'am, you'd honour us by living

with us, I'm sure Martha would do her best to make you comfortable ; and I'd keep out of your way as much as I could, which I reckon would be the best kindness such an awkward chap as me could do."

Miss Matty had been very busy with taking off her spectacles, wiping them, and replacing them ; but all she could say was, "Don't let any thought of me hurry you into marriage : pray don't ! Marriage is such a very solemn thing !"

"But Miss Matilda will think of your plan, Martha," said I, struck with the advantages that it offered, and unwilling¹⁰ to lose the opportunity of considering about it. "And I'm sure neither she nor I can ever forget your kindness ; nor yours either, Jem."

"Why, yes, ma'am ! I'm sure I mean kindly, though I'm a bit fluttered by being pushed straight ahead into matrimony, as it were, and mayn't express myself conformable. But I'm sure I'm willing enough, and give me time to get accustomed ; so, Martha, wench, what's the use of crying so, and slapping me if I come near ?"

This last was *sotto voce*, and had the effect of making Martha²⁰ bounce out of the room, to be followed and soothed by her lover. Whereupon Miss Matty sat down and cried very heartily, and accounted for it by saying that the thought of Martha being married so soon gave her quite a shock, and that she should never forgive herself if she thought she was hurrying the poor creature. I think my pity was more for Jem, of the two ; but both Miss Matty and I appreciated to the full the kindness of the honest couple.

The next morning, very early, I received a note from Miss Pole, so mysteriously wrapped up, and with so many seals³⁰ on it to secure secrecy, that I had to tear the paper before I could unfold it. And when I came to the writing I could hardly understand the meaning, it was so involved and oracular. I made out, however, that I was to go to Miss Pole's at eleven o'clock ; the number *eleven* being written in full length as well as in numerals, and *A.M.* twice dashed

under, as if I were very likely to come at eleven at night, when all Cranford was usually abed and asleep by ten. There was no signature except Miss Pole's initials reversed, P. E. ; but as Martha had given me the note, "with Miss Pole's kind regards," it needed no wizard to find out who sent it ; and if the writer's name was to be kept secret, it was very well that I was alone when Martha delivered it.

I went as requested to Miss Pole's. The door was opened to me by her little maid Lizzy in Sunday trim, as if some
10 grand event was impending over this work-day. And the drawing-room upstairs was arranged in accordance with this idea. The table was set out with the best green card-cloth, and writing materials upon it. On the little chiffonier was a tray with a newly-decantered bottle of cowslip-wine, and some ladies'-finger biscuits. Miss Pole herself was in solemn array, as if to receive visitors, although it was only eleven o'clock. Mrs. Forrester was there, crying quietly and sadly, and my arrival seemed only to call forth fresh tears. Before we had finished our greetings, performed with lugubrious
20 mystery of demeanour, there was another rat-tat-tat, and Mrs. Fitz-Adam appeared, crimson with walking and excitement. It seemed as if this was all the company expected ; for now Miss Pole made several demonstrations of being about to open the business of the meeting, by stirring the fire, opening and shutting the door, and coughing and blowing her nose. Then she arranged us all round the table, taking care to place me opposite to her ; and last of all, she inquired of me if the sad report was true, as she feared it was, that Miss Matty had lost all her fortune.

30 Of course I had but one answer to make ; and I never saw more unaffected sorrow depicted on any countenances than I did there on the three before me.

"I wish Mrs. Jamieson was here !" said Mrs. Forrester at last ; but to judge from Mrs. Fitz-Adam's face, she could not second the wish.

"But without Mrs. Jamieson," said Miss Pole, with just

a sound of offended merit in her voice, "we, the ladies of Cranford, in my drawing-room assembled, can resolve upon something. I imagine we are none of us what may be called rich, though we all possess a genteel competency, sufficient for tastes that are elegant and refined, and would not, if they could, be vulgarly ostentatious." (Here I observed Miss Pole refer to a small card concealed in her hand, on which I imagine she had put down a few notes.)

"Miss Smith," she continued, addressing me (familiarily known as "Mary" to all the company assembled, but this 10 was a state occasion), "I have conversed in private—I made it my business to do so yesterday afternoon—with these ladies on the misfortune which has happened to our friend, and one and all of us have agreed that while we have a superfluity, it is not only a duty, but a pleasure—a true pleasure, Mary!"—her voice was rather choked just here, and she had to wipe her spectacles before she could go on—"to give what we can to assist her—Miss Matilda Jenkyns. Only in consideration of the feelings of delicate independence existing in the mind of every refined female"—I was sure she had got back to the 20 card now—"we wish to contribute our mites in a secret and concealed manner, so as not to hurt the feelings I have referred to. And our object in requesting you to meet us this morning is that, believing you are the daughter—that your father is, in fact, her confidential adviser in all pecuniary matters, we imagined that, by consulting with him, you might devise some mode in which our contribution could be made to appear the legal due which Miss Matilda Jenkyns ought to receive from —. Probably your father, knowing her investments, can fill up the blank."

30

Miss Pole concluded her address, and looked round for approval and agreement.

"I have expressed your meaning, ladies, have I not? And while Miss Smith considers what reply to make, allow me to offer you some little refreshment."

I had no great reply to make; I had more thankfulness

at my heart for their kind thoughts than I cared to put into words ; and so I only mumbled out something to the effect " that I would name what Miss Pole had said to my father, and that if anything could be arranged for dear Miss Matty,"—and here I broke down utterly, and had to be refreshed with a glass of cowslip-wine before I could check the crying which had been repressed for the last two or three days. The worst was, all the ladies cried in concert. Even Miss Pole cried, who had said a hundred times that to betray emotion before
10 any one was a sign of weakness and want of self-control. She recovered herself into a slight degree of impatient anger, directed against me, as having set them all off ; and, moreover, I think she was vexed that I could not make a speech back in return for hers ; and if I had known beforehand what was to be said, and had a card on which to express the probable feelings that would rise in my heart, I would have tried to gratify her. As it was, Mrs. Forrester was the person to speak when we had recovered our composure.

" I don't mind, among friends, stating that I—no ! I'm
20 not poor exactly, but I don't think I'm what you may call rich ; I wish I were, for dear Miss Matty's sake—but, if you please, I'll write down in a sealed paper what I can give. I only wish it was more ; my dear Mary, I do indeed ! "

Now I saw why paper, pens, and ink were provided. Every lady wrote down the sum she could give annually, signed the paper, and sealed it mysteriously. If their proposal was acceded to, my father was to be allowed to open the papers, under pledge of secrecy. If not, they were to be returned to
30 their writers.

When this ceremony had been gone through, I rose to depart ; but each lady seemed to wish to have a private conference with me. Miss Pole kept me in the drawing-room to explain why, in Mrs. Jamieson's absence, she had taken the lead in this " movement," as she was pleased to call it, and also to inform me that she had heard from good sources that Mrs

Jamieson was coming home directly in a state of high displeasure against her sister-in-law.

On coming downstairs I found Mrs. Forrester waiting for me at the entrance to the dining-parlour; she drew me in, and when the door was shut, she tried two or three times to begin on some subject, which was so unapproachable apparently, that I began to despair of our ever getting to a clear understanding. At last out it came; the poor old lady trembling all the time as if it were a great crime which she was exposing to daylight in telling me how very, very little 10 she had to live upon; a confession which she was brought to make from a dread lest we should think that the small contribution named in her paper bore any proportion to her love and regard for Miss Matty. And yet that sum which she so eagerly relinquished was, in truth, more than a twentieth part of what she had to live upon, and keep house, and a little serving-maid, all as became one born a Tyrrell. And when the whole income does not nearly amount to a hundred pounds, to give up a twentieth of it will necessitate many careful economies, and many pieces of self-denial, small and insignifi- 20 cant in the world's account, but bearing a different value in another account-book that I have heard of. She did so wish she was rich, she said, and this wish she kept repeating, with no thought of herself in it, only with a longing, yearning desire to be able to heap up Miss Matty's measure of comforts.

It was some time before I could console her enough to leave her; and then, on quitting the house, I was waylaid by Mrs. Fitz-Adam, who had also her confidence to make of pretty nearly the opposite description. She had not liked to put down all that she could afford and was ready to give. 30 She told me she thought she could never look Miss Matty in the face again if she presumed to be giving her so much as she should like to do. "But if you can think of any way in which I might be allowed to give a little more without any one knowing it I should be so much obliged to you, my dear. And my brother would be delighted to doctor her for nothing

—medicines, leeches, and all. I know that he and her ladyship (my dear, I little thought that I should ever come to be sister-in-law to a ladyship !) would do anything for her. We all would.”

My father came the next morning :

I am not going to weary you with the details of all the business we went through. My father was clear-headed and decisive, and a capital man of business, and if we made the slightest inquiry, or expressed the slightest want of comprehension, he had a sharp way of saying, “ Eh ? eh ? it’s as clear as daylight. What’s your objection ? ” And as we had not comprehended anything of what he had proposed, we found it rather difficult to shape our objections ; in fact, we never were sure if we had any.

While Miss Matty was out of the room giving orders for luncheon I told him of the meeting of the Cranford ladies at Miss Pole’s the day before. He kept brushing his hand before his eyes as I spoke—and when I went back to Martha’s offer the evening before, of receiving Miss Matty as a lodger, 20 he fairly walked away from me to the window, and began drumming with his fingers upon it. Then he turned abruptly round, and said, “ See, Mary, how a good, innocent life makes friends all round. Confound it ! I could make a good lesson out of it if I were a parson ! but, as it is, I can’t get a tail to my sentences—only I’m sure you feel what I want to say. You and I will have a walk after lunch and talk a bit more about these plans.”

The lunch—a hot, savoury mutton-chop, and a little of the cold *lion* sliced and fried—was now brought in. Every morsel 30 of this last dish was finished, to Martha’s great gratification. Then my father bluntly told Miss Matty he wanted to talk to me alone, and that he would stroll out and see some of the old places, and then I could tell her what plan we thought desirable.

The result of our conversation was this. If all parties were agreeable, Martha and Jem were to be married with as little

delay as possible, and they were to live on in Miss Matty's present abode ; the sum which the Cranford ladies had agreed to contribute annually being sufficient to meet the greater part of the rent, and leaving Martha free to appropriate what Miss Matty should pay for her lodgings to any little extra comforts required. About the sale, my father was dubious at first. He said the old rectory furniture, however carefully used and reverently treated, would fetch very little ; and that little would be but as a drop in the sea of the debts of the Town and County Bank. But when I represented how Miss 10 Matty's tender conscience would be soothed by feeling that she had done what she could, he gave way. I then alluded to my idea that she might add to her small income by selling tea ; and, to my surprise, my father grasped at it. The small dining-parlour was to be converted into a shop, without any of its degrading characteristics ; a table was to be the counter ; one window was to be retained unaltered, and the other changed into a glass door. I evidently rose in his estimation for having made this bright suggestion. I only 20 hoped we should not both fall in Miss Matty's.

But she was patient and content with all our arrangements. She knew, she said, that we should do the best we could for her ; and she only hoped, only stipulated, that she should pay every farthing that she could be said to owe, for her father's sake, who had been so respected in Cranford.

CHAPTER XV

A HAPPY RETURN

BEFORE I left Miss Matty at Cranford everything had been comfortably arranged for her. Even Mrs. Jamieson's approval of her selling tea had been gained. That oracle had taken a few days to consider whether by so doing Miss Matty would forfeit her right to the privileges of society in Cranford. 30

I think she had some little idea of mortifying Lady Glenmire by the decision she gave at last ; which was to this effect : that whereas a married woman takes her husband's rank by the strict laws of precedence, an unmarried woman retains the station her father occupied. So Cranford was allowed to visit Miss Matty ; and, whether allowed or not, it intended to visit Lady Glenmire.

But what was our surprise—our dismay—when we learnt that Mr. and *Mrs. Hoggins* were returning on the following 20 Tuesday. *Mrs. Hoggins* ! Had she absolutely dropped her title, and so, in a spirit of bravado, cut the aristocracy to become a *Hoggins* ! She, who might have been called Lady Glenmire to her dying day !

Miss Matty's sale went off famously. She retained the furniture of her sitting-room and bedroom ; the former of which she was to occupy till Martha could meet with a lodger who might wish to take it ; and into this sitting-room and bedroom she had to cram all sorts of things, which were (the auctioneer assured her) bought in for her at the sale by an 20 unknown friend. I always suspected *Mrs. Fitz-Adam* of this ; but she must have had an accessory, who knew what articles were particularly regarded by Miss Matty on account of their associations with her early days. The rest of the house looked rather bare, to be sure ; all except one tiny bedroom, of which my father allowed me to purchase the furniture for my occasional use in case of Miss Matty's illness.

I had expended my own small store in buying all manner of comfits and lozenges, in order to tempt the little people whom Miss Matty loved so much to come about her. Tea 30 in bright green canisters, and comfits in tumblers—Miss Matty and I felt quite proud as we looked round us on the evening before the shop was to be opened. Martha had scoured the boarded floor to a white cleanness, and it was adorned with a brilliant piece of oilcloth, on which customers were to stand before the table-counter. The wholesome smell of plaster and whitewash pervaded the apartment. A

very small "Matilda Jenkyns, licensed to sell tea," was hidden under the lintel of the new door, and two boxes of tea, with cabalistic inscriptions all over them, stood ready to disgorge their contents into the canisters.

I left Miss Matty with a good heart. Her sales of tea during the first two days had surpassed my most sanguine expectations. The whole country round seemed to be all out of tea at once.

I went over from Drumble once a quarter at least to settle the accounts, and see after the necessary business letters. 10 And, speaking of letters, I began to be very much ashamed of remembering my letter to the Aga Jenkyns, and very glad I had never named my writing to any one.

About a year after Miss Matty set up shop, I received one of Martha's hieroglyphics, begging me to come to Cranford very soon. I was afraid that Miss Matty was ill, and went off that very afternoon, and took Martha by surprise when she saw me on opening the door. We went into the kitchen, as usual, to have our confidential conference, and then Martha told me she was expecting her confinement very soon—in a 20 week or two; and she did not think Miss Matty was aware of it, and she wanted me to break the news to her, "for, indeed, miss," continued Martha, crying hysterically, "I'm afraid she won't approve of it, and I'm sure I don't know who is to take care of her as she should be taken care of when I am laid up."

I comforted Martha by telling her I would remain till she was about again, and only wished she had told me her reason for this sudden summons, as then I would have brought the requisite stock of clothes. 30

I then stole out of the house-door, and made my appearance as if I were a customer in the shop, just to take Miss Matty by surprise, and gain an idea of how she looked in her new situation. It was warm May weather, so only the little half-door was closed; and Miss Matty sat behind her counter, knitting an elaborate pair of garters; elaborate they seemed

to me, but the difficult stitch was no weight upon her mind, for she was singing in a low voice to herself as her needles went rapidly in and out. I went in. At first she did not catch who it was, and stood up as if to serve me; but in another minute watchful pussy had clutched her knitting, which was dropped in eager joy at seeing me.

One morning, within a week after I arrived, I went to call Miss Matty, with a little bundle of flannel in my arms. She was very much awestruck when I showed her what it was, 10 and asked for her spectacles off the dressing-table, and looked at it curiously, with a sort of tender wonder at its small perfection of parts. She could not banish the thought of the surprise all day, but went about on tiptoe, and was very silent. But she stole up to see Martha, and they both cried with joy, and she got into a complimentary speech to Jem, and did not know how to get out of it again, and was only extricated from her dilemma by the sound of the shop-bell, which was an equal relief to the shy, proud, honest Jem, who shook my hand so vigorously when I congratulated him that 20 I think I feel the pain of it yet.

I had a busy life while Martha was laid up. I attended on Miss Matty, and prepared her meals; I cast up her accounts, and examined into the state of her canisters and tumblers. I was happy to find she had made more than twenty pounds during the last year by her sales of tea; and, moreover, that now she was accustomed to it, she did not dislike the employment, which brought her into kindly intercourse with many of the people round about. If she gave them good weight, they, in their turn, brought many a little 30 country present to the "old rector's daughter"; a cream cheese, a few new-laid eggs, a little fresh ripe fruit, a bunch of flowers. The counter was quite loaded with these offerings sometimes, as she told me.

As for Cranford in general, it was going on much as usual. The Jamieson and Hoggins feud still raged, if a feud it could be called, when only one side cared much about it. Mr. and

Mrs. Hoggins were very happy together, and, like most very happy people, quite ready to be friendly; indeed, Mrs. Hoggins was really desirous to be restored to Mrs. Jamieson's good graces because of the former intimacy. But Mrs. Jamieson considered their very happiness an insult to the Glenmire family, to which she had still the honour to belong, and she doggedly refused and rejected every advance.

Martha was beginning to go about again, and I had already fixed a limit, not very far distant, to my visit, when one afternoon, as I was sitting in the shop-parlour with Miss 10 Matty, we saw a gentleman go slowly past the window, and then stand opposite to the door, as if looking out for the name which we had so carefully hidden. He took out a double eyeglass, and peered about for some time before he could discover it. Then he came in. And, all on a sudden, it flashed across me that it was the Aga himself! For his clothes had an out-of-the-way foreign cut about them, and his face was deep brown, as if tanned and re-tanned by the sun. His complexion contrasted oddly with his plentiful snow-white hair, his eyes were dark and piercing. His 20 glance had first caught and lingered a little upon me, but then turned to Miss Matty. She was a little fluttered and nervous, but no more so than she always was when any man came into her shop. She thought that he would probably have a note, or a sovereign at least, for which she would have to give change, which was an operation she very much disliked to perform. But the present customer stood opposite to her, without asking for anything, only looking fixedly at her as he drummed upon the table with his fingers, just for all the world as Miss Jenkyns used to do. Miss Matty was on the point of asking 30 him what he wanted (as she told me afterwards), when he turned sharp to me: "Is your name Mary Smith?"

"Yes!" said I.

All my doubts as to his identity were set at rest, and I only wondered what he would say or do next, and how Miss Matty would stand the joyful shock of what he had to reveal.

Apparently he was at a loss how to announce himself, for he looked round at last in search of something to buy, so as to gain time, and, as it happened, his eye caught on the almond comfits, and he boldly asked for a pound of "those things." I doubt if Miss Matty had a whole pound in the shop, and, besides the unusual magnitude of the order, she was distressed with the idea of the indigestion they would produce, taken in such unlimited quantities. She looked up to remonstrate. Something of tender relaxation in his face struck home to her heart. She said, "It is—oh, sir! can you be Peter?" and trembled from head to foot. In a moment he was round the table and had her in his arms, sobbing the tearless cries of old age. I brought her a glass of wine, for indeed her colour had changed so as to alarm me, and Mr. Peter too. He kept saying, "I have been too sudden for you, Matty—I have, my little girl."

I proposed that she should go at once up into the drawing-room and lie down on the sofa there. She looked wistfully at her brother, whose hand she had held tight, even when nearly fainting; but on his assuring her that he would not leave her, she allowed him to carry her upstairs.

I thought that the best I could do was to run and put the kettle on the fire for early tea, and then to attend to the shop, leaving the brother and sister to exchange some of the many thousand things they must have to say. I had also to break the news to Martha, who received it with a burst of tears which nearly infected me. She kept recovering herself to ask if I was sure it was indeed Miss Matty's brother, for I had mentioned that he had gray hair, and she had always heard that he was a very handsome young man. Something of the same kind perplexed Miss Matty at tea-time, when she was installed in the great easy-chair opposite to Mr. Jenkyns's in order to gaze her fill. She could hardly drink for looking at him, and as for eating, that was out of the question.

"I suppose hot climates age people very quickly," said she,

almost to herself. "When you left Cranford you had not a gray hair in your head."

"But how many years ago is that?" said Mr. Peter, smiling.

"Ah, true! yes, I suppose you and I are getting old. But still I did not think we were so very old! But white hair is very becoming to you, Peter," she continued—a little afraid lest she had hurt him by revealing how his appearance had impressed her.

"I suppose I forgot dates too, Matty, for what do you 10 think I have brought for you from India? I have an Indian muslin gown and a pearl necklace for you somewhere in my chest at Portsmouth." He smiled as if amused at the idea of the incongruity of his presents with the appearance of his sister; but this did not strike her all at once, while the elegance of the articles did.

Long, long into the night, far, far into the morning, did Miss Matty and I talk. She had much to tell me of her brother's life and adventures, which he had communicated to her as they had sat alone. He had been a volunteer at 20 the siege of Rangoon; had been taken prisoner by the Burmese; had obtained favour and eventual freedom from knowing how to bleed the chief of the small tribe in some case of dangerous illness; on his release from years of captivity he had had his letters returned from England with the ominous word "Dead" marked upon them; and, believing himself to be the last of his race, he had settled down as an indigo planter; when my letter reached him, with the odd vehemence which characterised him in age as it had done in youth, he had sold his lands to the first purchaser, and come home to the 30 poor old sister, who was more glad and rich than any princess when she looked at him.

I don't believe Mr. Peter came home from India as rich as a nabob; he even considered himself poor; but neither he nor Miss Matty cared much about that. At any rate, he had enough to live upon "very genteelly" at Cranford, he and

Miss Matty together. And a day or two after his arrival, the shop was closed, while troops of little urchins gleefully awaited the shower of comfits and lozenges that came from time to time down upon their faces as they stood up-gazing at Miss Matty's drawing-room windows. Occasionally Miss Matty would say to them (half hidden behind the curtains), "My dear children, don't make yourselves ill"; but a strong arm pulled her back, and a more rattling shower than ever succeeded. A part of the tea was sent in presents to the
10 Cranford ladies; and some of it was distributed among the old people who remembered Mr. Peter in the days of his frolicsome youth. The India muslin gown was reserved for darling Flora Gordon (Miss Jessie Brown's daughter). The Gordons had been on the Continent for the last few years, but were now expected to return very soon; and Miss Matty, in her sisterly pride, anticipated great delight in the joy of showing them Mr. Peter. The pearl necklace disappeared; and about that time many handsome and useful presents made their appearance in the households of Miss Pole and
20 Mrs. Forrester; and some rare and delicate Indian ornaments graced the drawing-rooms of Mrs. Jamieson and Mrs. Fitz-Adam. I myself was not forgotten. Among other things I had the handsomest bound and best edition of Dr. Johnson's works that could be procured; and dear Miss Matty, with tears in her eyes, begged me to consider it as a present from her sister as well as herself. In short, no one was forgotten; and, what was more, every one, however insignificant, who had shown kindness to Miss Matty at any time, was sure of Mr. Peter's cordial regard.

CHAPTER XVI

PEACE TO CRANFORD

I LEFT Miss Matty and Mr. Peter most comfortable and contented ; the only subject for regret to the tender heart of the one, and the social friendly nature of the other, being the unfortunate quarrel between Mrs. Jamieson and the plebeian Hogginses. In joke, I prophesied one day that this would only last until Mrs. Jamieson or Mr. Mulliner were ill ; but Miss Matty did not like my looking forward to anything like illness in so light a manner, and before the year was out all had come round in a far more satisfactory way.

I received two Cranford letters on one October morning. 10 Both Miss Pole and Miss Matty wrote to ask me to come over and meet the Gordons, who had returned to England with their two children. Dear Jessie Brown had kept her kind nature ; and she wrote to say that she and Major Gordon expected to be in Cranford on the fourteenth, and she begged to be remembered to Mrs. Jamieson, Miss Pole, and Miss Matty, Mrs. Forrester, Mr. Hoggins (and here came in an allusion to kindness shown to the dead long ago), his new wife, who as such must allow Mrs. Gordon to desire to make her acquaintance, and who was, moreover, an old Scotch friend of her husband's. 20 All were asked to luncheon.

But when I arrived in Cranford nothing was as yet ascertained of Mrs. Jamieson's own intentions ; would the honourable lady go, or would she not ? Mr. Peter declared that she should and she would ; Miss Pole shook her head and desponded. But Mr. Peter was a man of resources.

I did not know how things were going on until Miss Pole asked me, just the day before Mrs. Gordon came, if I thought there was anything between Mr. Peter and Mrs. Jamieson, for that Mrs. Jamieson was really going to the lunch at the 30 "George." She had sent Mr. Mulliner down to desire that

there might be a footstool put to the warmest seat in the room, as she meant to come, and knew that their chairs were very high.

When I got back to Miss Matty's I really did begin to think that Mr. Peter might be thinking of Mrs. Jamieson for a wife. He had the proof sheet of a great placard in his hand. "Signor Brunoni" was going to "perform in Cranford for one night only." He had written to ask the signor to come, and was to be at all the expenses of the affair. Tickets were to be
10 sent gratis to as many as the room would hold. But I looked only at the fatal words :

*"Under the Patronage of the HONOURABLE
MRS. JAMIESON."*

She, then, was chosen to preside over this entertainment.

So, angry and irritated, and exaggerating every little incident, I went on till we were all assembled in the great parlour at the "George." Major and Mrs. Gordon were as friendly as could be ; but I could hardly attend to them for watching Mr. Peter. I had never seen Mrs. Jamieson so
20 animated before ; her face looked full of interest in what Mr. Peter was saying. I drew near to listen. My relief was great when I caught that his words were not words of love, but that, for all his grave face, he was at his old tricks. He was telling her of his travels in India, and describing the wonderful height of the Himalaya mountains : one touch after another added to their size, and each exceeded the former in absurdity ; but Mrs. Jamieson really enjoyed all in perfect good faith. Mr. Peter caught my eye, and gave me such a
funny twinkle, that I felt sure he had no thoughts of Mrs.
30 Jamieson as a wife from that time.

After a little while, turning to me, he said, "Don't be shocked, prim little Mary, at my wonderful stories. I consider Mrs. Jamieson fair game, and besides I am bent on propitiating her, and the first step towards it is keeping her well awake. I bribed her here by asking her to let me have

her name as patroness for my poor conjurer this evening ; and I don't want to give her time enough to get up her rancour against the Hogginses, who are just coming in. I want everybody to be friends, for it harasses Matty so much to hear of these quarrels. I intend to enter the Assembly Room to-night with Mrs. Jamieson on one side, and my lady, Mrs. Hoggins, on the other. You see if I don't."

Somehow or another he did ; and fairly got them into conversation together. Major and Mrs. Gordon helped at the good work with their perfect ignorance of any existing coolness 10 between any of the inhabitants of Cranford.

Ever since that day there has been the old friendly sociability in Cranford society ; which I am thankful for, because of my dear Miss Matty's love of peace and kindness. We all love Miss Matty, and I somehow think we are all of us better when she is near us.

NOTES

- P. 2, l. 19. **Manx laws**: the Isle of Man has its own Parliament, and the titles of new laws (no longer the full text of the laws) are still read publicly every year on Tynwald Hill.
- P. 3, l. 30. **Pattens**: described in the *Ladies' Dictionary*, 1684, as "a wooden shoe with iron bottom." Owing to the flimsy nature of ladies' shoes, something of the nature of pattens was essential, especially in the bad state of the roads. Pattens remained in use in the North for some time after they had died out in London.
- P. 6, l. 7. **Preference**: a card game for three or four players: something like whist, only that the trump is determined by bidding.
- P. 7, l. 5. **Pickwick Papers**: these appeared from April, 1836, to November, 1837. 400 copies were bound of the 1st number, but the appearance of Sam Weller in the narrative was so popular that of the 15th number the binder prepared 40,000.
- P. 7, l. 32. **Swarry**: there is a mistake here in the allusion to the famous dinner in Bath. Sam Weller, Mr. Pickwick's servant, was a guest, not the host.
- P. 8, l. 1. **Rasselas**: Dr. Johnson, in his short romance of this name, makes Imlac, the Philosopher, converse with Rasselas, imaginary Prince of Abyssinia, on such subjects as the relative value of poverty and riches, or of ignorance and knowledge; and the general difficulties in the way of the pursuit of happiness. Whichever of these conversations Miss Jenkins selected must have formed a striking contrast to the sayings of Sam Weller and the Bath footmen, and would hardly have been described by anyone of modern tastes as "light and agreeable fiction."
- P. 8, l. 4. **Mr. Boz**: Charles Dickens first used "Boz" as his signature, to a paper in the *Monthly Magazine* for August, 1824: it was the nickname of his youngest

brother, and was supposed to be a corruption of Moses.

- P. 18, l. 19. **The Rambler** : a set of serious essays which appeared in numbers, all of which except five were written by Dr. Johnson. They ran from March 20th, 1750, to March 14th, 1752, and appeared every Tuesday and Saturday during the two years ; so they formed a solid argument on the side of Captain Brown.
- P. 18, l. 26. **The Christmas Carol** : published by Dickens in 1843, ten years before *Cranford* appeared in book form.
- P. 25, l. 33. **Sarsanet** : a very fine soft silk material, made both plain and twilled.
- P. 30, l. 33. **Calash** : a bonnet introduced into England in 1765, made much like the hood of a carriage, and pulled over the head by a string attached to one of the whalebone hoops with which it was supported. It was used as a protection in cold or wet weather.
- P. 31, l. 9. **The cedar spreads his dark-green layers of shade** : Mr. Holbrook did not quote quite correctly ; the line runs, *A cedar spread*, etc. It is from Tennyson's poem, *The Gardener's Daughter*, published in 1842.
- P. 31, l. 19. **ash-buds in March** : another quotation from *The Gardener's Daughter*, " More black than ash-buds in the front of March."
- P. 32, l. 5. **Locksley Hall** : first appeared in Tennyson's *Poems*, in 2 vols., published in 1842. Had Miss Matty been able to understand the poem at all, there would have been a strange pathos in hearing it from the lips of her old lover.
- P. 38, l. 25. **Tonquin beans** : seeds of a tree in Venezuela, called the Cuamara. They are sweet smelling, and are used for scenting wardrobes, etc., either whole or in powder. They are like long black almonds, with shiny skins.
- P. 52, l. 30. **Bombazine**, a material dating from the days of Queen Elizabeth, made of silk and wool. Later it was made of pure silk, then again mixed with worsted : but it was always cheap, so no doubt seemed to Miss Jenkyns suitable as mourning for a farmer's daughter.
- P. 54, l. 26. **Cribbage** : a card game, played as a rule only by two : it has a small wooden board with holes and pegs for marking the score.

- P. 54, l. 30. **Spadille** : term used in game of Ombre for Ace of Spades ; 1st Honour in all suits, and ranks as trump whatever is trump.
- P. 54, l. 30. **Manille** : also term in game of Ombre. The word comes from the Spanish *Malilla*, i.e. the little bad one. In all suits, as soon as trump has been declared, the lowest card, manille, takes rank as 2nd Honour.
- P. 57, l. 13. **Sedan-chair** : a covered carrying-chair to seat one person. It was borne on two poles, one bearer in front and one behind, and was fashionable in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries.
- P. 64, l. 6. **St. James' Chronicle** : a weekly paper running at that time.
- P. 64, l. 28. **Ombre** : a card game for three or four players ; of Spanish origin, and still played in Spain, Germany and South America. An ombre pack had forty cards, omitting eight, nine, and ten in each suit. The scoring was by counters of different values. It was a complicated game, and proficiency in it showed Lady Glenmure to be no mean card-player.
- P. 64, l. 28. **Quadrille** : a variation on the game of Ombre.
- P. 64, l. 30. **Basto** : term in *Ombre*, for Ace of Clubs ; 3rd Honour in all suits, and ranks as trump whatever suit is trump.
- P. 85, l. 5. **Aga** : a Turkish military term. There does not seem any very obvious reason why Mary Smith or Mrs. Brown should apply it to Mr. Peter Jenkyns, Indigo Planter.
- P. 86, l. 4. **Wombwell** : George Wombwell, who lived from 1778 to 1850, once kept a shop in Soho, where he shewed two boa constrictors with such success that he formed a travelling menagerie, which became the finest in England.
- P. 115, l. 21. **Rangoon** : this was evidently the first siege of Rangoon, when it was occupied by the English in 1824, during the first Burmese War. Peter's parents were married in 1774, and he was the youngest of their three children ; he must have been well over forty at the time of the siege.

QUESTIONS

AND

SUBJECTS FOR SHORT ESSAYS

1. Describe a day as spent by you in Cranford, in the person of Miss Mary Smith. Whom would you visit ?

2. Fill in at length the conversation in which Miss Mary Smith tried to learn from Miss Pole and Mrs. Forrester some particulars about Peter Jenkyns.

3. What games are mentioned in *Cranford* ? Give any details you can about them.

4. Add one imaginary guest to Mrs. Forrester's party, and make her describe her own special subject of dread.

5. What parts did the following characters play in the story ?
Peggy : Flora Gordon : John Jenkyns : Fanny : Jem Hearn : Mr. Mulliner.

6. Compare life in Cranford with that in any small town described by a more modern novelist.

7. In several editions of *Cranford* a misprint occurs in the text : in Chapter XIV., when the father of Mary Smith lunches with Miss Matty, the second course of the meal is described as :

“ A little of the cold loin sliced and fried.”

Correct this, and comment on it.

8. In Chapter VI., while Miss Matty is narrating the story of “ poor Peter,” she says : “ It was only, as he told me afterwards, to make something to talk about in the town.” What is puzzling in this passage ?

9. “ True humour is sunshine seen through rain.” Explain this saying, and find instances of its truth in *Cranford*.

10. Is there anything in *Cranford* that “ a mere man ” could not have written ?

11. Could anybody do for a large town, or for a London suburb, what Mrs. Gaskell did for Knutsford ?

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